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# Containing Fatness: Bodies, Motherhood, and Civic Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture

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CONTAINING FATNESS:  
BODIES, MOTHERHOOD, AND CIVIC IDENTITY IN  
CONTEMPORARY U.S. CULTURE

by

Ruth Janet Beerman

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
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May 2015

ABSTRACT  
CONTAINING FATNESS:  
BODIES, MOTHERHOOD, AND CIVIC IDENTITY IN  
CONTEMPORARY U.S. CULTURE

by

Ruth Janet Beerman

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015  
Under the Supervision of Professor Leslie J. Harris

The body, and visualizations of the body, serve as a way read appropriate consumption and citizenship: Weight operates as a key way to see literal consumption. U.S. citizenship is now commonly understood as consumptive bodily citizenship, where one's body, or one's child's body, communicates their civic standing. Drawing on three case studies concerning childhood obesity, this dissertation demonstrates how rhetorics of and about the fat body construct the public identity of good citizen and good mother.

*Keywords: citizenship, fatness, good body, motherhood, visual rhetoric*

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## DEDICATION

For all types of mothers who commit to the intensive mothering of all kinds of children.  
Thank you for what you do.



CHAPTER ONE:  
THE FAT BODY AS PUBLIC

One of America's fall traditions includes Halloween, where children dress up in costumes and go around their neighborhoods trick or treating, collecting candy. However, during the fall of 2013, a North Dakota woman named Cheryl worried about the message and potential pounds that providing candy to children may provide (Sieczkowki, 2013; "Woman to hand out," 2013). Calling into the Fargo/Moorhead metropolitan radio station Y.94, Cheryl explained she would only distribute candy to those children who, in her opinion, did not fall into moderate or morbidly obese categories and instead hand them a sealed letter to give to their parents ("Woman to hand out," 2013; Zero, 2013). She justified her decision by drawing on notions of communal responsibility: "I'm contributing to their health problems and really, their kids are everybody's kids. It's a whole village" ("Woman handing out letters," 2013, para. 6). More specifically, the letter outlined the need for the community to step in because parents have failed in their ability to adequately manage their children's eating habits:

Happy Halloween and Happy Holidays Neighbor!

You are probably wondering why your child has this note; have you ever heard the saying, "It takes a village to raise a child?" I am disappointed in "the village" of Fargo Moorhead, West Fargo.

You [sic] child is, in my opinion, moderately obese and should not be consuming sugar and treats to the extent of some children this Halloween season.

My hope is that you will step up as a parent and ration candy this Halloween and not allow your child to continue these unhealthy eating habits[.]

Thank You (Zero, 2013, text from image provided with online article)

In this letter, Cheryl argued that her neighborly and civic duty involved taking action on what she deemed poor eating choices, even if that duty entailed blaming the parents for children's behavior. She argued her advocacy extended beyond her intention to distribute such letters; Cheryl hoped her call to the radio station would start a larger conversation regarding fatness and obesity from the station's listeners (Zero, 2013).

After being reported on the radio station Y.94's website and the local newspaper *Valley News Live*, the story quickly went viral and captured the attention of national media.<sup>1</sup> Coverage included the four major broadcast news stations and seven of the top ten digitally circulated newspapers:<sup>2</sup> *ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*, *Fox News*, *Fox News Insider*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, *New York Daily News*, *New York Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Denver Post*, and *Los Angeles Times* (Bailey, 2013a, 2013b; Castillo, 2013; The Denver Post Editorial Board, 2013; DiBlasio, 2013; Hubbard, 2013; Miller, 2013; "Outrageous: Women giving," 2013; Petri, 2013; "Woman gives warning letter," 2013; "Woman plans to give letter," 2013; "Woman to hand out," 2013). Other national media coverage included *CNN*, *Washington Times*, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Sacramento Bee*, *The Atlantic*, *Time Magazine*, *Huffington Post*, *Business Insider*, and *Reuters* news service (Bailey, 2013c; Chasmar, 2013; Hamblin, 2013; Mathis, 2013; Sieczkowski, 2013; "Video: Women to give," 2013; Wallace, 2013; Waxman, 2013; Willet, 2013). Popular and alternative news sources, including *Jezebel*, *Gawker*, and *Vanity Fair*, also covered the story (Ryan, 2013; Weiner, 2013; Zimmerman, 2013). Some reports questioned the authenticity of the letter and

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, local news station affiliates were excluded when listing the viral nature of this story. However, the fact that local news affiliates outside of Fargo/Moorhead did cover this story demonstrated the impact of this story to capture the national stage.

<sup>2</sup> Fox (2013) listed the top ten newspapers with digital circulation (from first to last) as: *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Daily News*, *New York Post*, *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Denver Post*, and *NewsDay*. See Fox, Z. (2013, August 6). Top 10 U.S. newspapers ranked by digital circulation. Mashable.com. Retrieved from <http://mashable.com/2013/08/06/newspapers-digital-subscriptions/>

called it a hoax or publicity stunt (Collins, 2013; Reuer, 2013; Ryan, 2013). Regardless of the letter's authenticity, Cheryl's actions and the viral media coverage draw attention to a larger question: Why do people in the United States, such as this radio caller, publicly discipline other's bodies regarding body weight? This question informs the direction and scope of this dissertation.

My argument is that within the U.S., dominant rhetorics of fatness and obesity posit fat bodies hurt the entire nation. To be a good citizen, one must embody a good body, which is commonly understood to be a thin body. Also, as narratives of children's obesity circulate in prominence, the stakes for mothers become even higher. As children are appropriated to represent the worth of mothers, only bad mothers are represented as producing fat children, which, in turn, makes poor citizens.

The body crystalizes and gives form to the imagined ideals of citizenship in embodied practice. Lauren Berlant (1997) argued citizenship does not just constitute an idea, but an enactment of those ideas: "To live fully both the ordinariness and sublimity of national identity, one must be capable not just of imagining, but of managing being an American" (p. 25). Thus, even if individuals know the norms of citizenship, their bodies stand as material, visual evidence of their enactment of citizenship, demonstrating that they have either passed or failed a key component within their body. The fat body fails to embody appropriate citizenship, and the failure is rooted within the physical, corporeal form of the body itself. These bodies stand in as failed citizens, as they have failed to master the ability to self-regulate and control their bodily presentation and/or presentation of their children. In this way, fat bodies are seen to fail the enactment of appropriate citizenship.

In this dissertation I prove that bodies demonstrate one's level of consumption, and individuals are called upon to enact their civic duty to regulate others' bodies for the sake of the nation. With a shifting of U.S. citizenship to the individual and personal level, visualizations of the body demonstrate one's civic status; civic duty becomes manifested in the body. When the individual becomes representative of the nation, the individual body then functions as a key way to negotiate the seeming contradiction between civic-republican and liberal-individual conceptions of citizenship. The body is both/and, whereby an individual body demonstrates both its individual aspects as well as representing the public identity of citizen; additionally, the body is also both a product and a status marker. Dominant rhetorics of fatness and obesity interpellate individuals as having a civic duty to both self-regulate and regulate the bodies of others. The seemingly naturalized connections between certain body types and appropriate consumption hide the logical leaps and work done to make those claims. Ultimately, citizenship functions as an enacted performance where civic duty becomes people's duty to regulate both themselves and others as a civic duty deriving from this conceptualization of citizenship. This chapter outlines my overall theory of citizenship, and applies it to the current rhetorics of fatness and obesity.

### **Tensions in Citizenship**

The media response to Cheryl's fat letter revealed two seeming tensions regarding citizenship: (1) the national citizenship frame and (2) the individual citizenship frame. The national citizenship framing argued the health of individual children impacted the overall community, analogous to the civic-republican view of citizenship which focuses on common goods. The individual citizenship framing could counter Cheryl by arguing individual parents or

children should be able to eat what they choose, analogous to the liberal view of citizenship which focuses on individual rights.

Civic-republican views of citizenship draw on contributions from Aristotle, John Locke, and James Madison (Honohan, 2002). In this perspective, the community or nation-state becomes prioritized over the individual, as all citizens exist as members of that larger group: “Citizens must develop an awareness of *the common good*, which exists over and above their private self-interests” (Peterson, 2011, p. 3). The common good stems from the idea of natural rights, in which people “already have certain moral obligations toward each other” (Taylor, 2004, p. 3); political actions draw on these natural rights to establish their sovereignty and authority to act. Once the common good is established, the duty of citizens then becomes taking “some personal responsibility for realising [sic] it” (Honohan, 2002, p. 147). Thus, in this understanding of citizenship, common good for all society becomes prioritized over individuals’ rights by establishing a value hierarchy of the community over the individual.

Contrastingly, liberalism’s views of citizenship reverses civic-republicanism’s value hierarchy, as it views communal goods becoming the tyranny of the majority of individuals (see Clanton, 2009, p. xii). Thus, although liberalism draws on similar traditions to civic-republicanism, liberalism places the individual first: It views the individual “as being prior to society” and thus “rights [are] prior to the [common] good” (Peterson, 2011, p. 10). Key contributors to this notion of citizenship include Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mills, John Rawls, and Richard Rorty (Sandel, 2009). From this perspective, government or community actions impose one particular viewpoint onto citizens, restricting individual freedom and choice, particularly as individuals disagree about what should be done. Michael J. Sandel (2009) noted

liberalism argues against democratically enacted policies, as it constricts the individual's right to choose one's own way: "The claim for the priority of the rights . . . protect[s] individuals from policies, even democratically enacted ones, that would impose a preferred conception of the good and so fail to respect people's freedom to chose their own conceptions" (p. 352). In this understanding of citizenship, the government or the community should protect individual rights rather than requiring individuals to sacrifice those rights to the common good.

Although these two theories of citizenship do function as theoretical opposites, in practice they are often blend, and indeed, scholars noted the multiple conceptions of U.S. citizenship which draw on both theoretical foundations (see Bennett, 2009; Schudson, 1998; Smith, 1997). Multiple theories of citizenship drew upon both traditions, and I argue that both views of citizenship are important and argue against viewing citizenship as either/or. Here I draw on Michael Schudson's (1998) argument that although notions of U.S. citizenship changed throughout the centuries, "past models of citizenship have not vanished as newer models became ascendant" (p. 294). Additionally, my articulation of citizenship as containing both civic-republican and liberal ideas also draws on Rogers M. Smith's (1997) understanding of civic ideals, which includes a mix of both traditions along with notions of inequality.<sup>3</sup> He argued, "This multiple traditions thesis holds that American political actors have always promoted civic ideologies that blend liberal, democratic republican, and inegalitarian ascriptive elements in various combinations designed to be politically popular" (p. 6). Focusing on multiple understandings of citizenship enables scholars to both see tensions and evaluate how such

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<sup>3</sup> Smith analyzed legal cases, with some legislative acts, and argued the juridical context functioned as the most important and longitudinal for understanding citizenship (p. 7). Although I agree that legalized understandings of citizenship matter, I argue scholars also need to evaluate how citizenship is constructed in the public discourse and why I focused on both political and individual publicly available discourses. Additionally, with the increase of media and technological advancements, there are more opportunities for public discussions of bodily citizenship.

traditions can be mutually reinforcing, rather than dichotomous. As Smith stated, “a multiple traditions approach leads us to expect that the major political parties and actors will offer varying civic conceptions blending liberal, republican, and ascriptive elements in different combinations, and that important conflicts will occur over all these contrasting elements” (p. 8).

The North Dakota fat letter served as an important backdrop to the wider understandings of bodily citizenship, more specifically that the body operates as a way to negotiate the seeming tensions between national/republican and individual/liberal citizenship. Within the framing of national or civic-republican view of citizenship, fat bodies hurt all of the nation of the United States, so individual people and institutions need to take action. From an individualized citizenship or liberal frame, each person should be able to do what we want, even if that means eating ourselves to death. These two tensions, national/civic-republican and individual/liberal, are not opposites, but exist along a continuum of understandings of citizenship, demonstrating the complexity of current understandings of citizenship and both work to inform our understandings of the current process of citizenship. Bodies frequently have been sites of criticism and surveillance; however, now judgment of one’s own body as well as others serves an important public and civic duty. To demonstrate this part of my argument, this next section outlines how bodies represent cultural and societal attitudes as well as citizenship.

### **Fat Bodies as Public Bodies**

Rather than being seen as an individual, the body stands in to represent society at large: “The image of the body is used in different ways to reflect and enhance each person’s experience of society” (Douglas, 1996, p. xxxvi). One’s body does not merely signify identity about that one individual (although it does), but also reflects social and cultural attitudes, creating the social

body. This dissertation uses the locus of the fat body to demonstrate how bodily citizenship takes shape.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the broad terms “fat” or “fatness” to refer to the overall cultural and ideological understandings of bodily weight.<sup>4</sup> When I use the terms “obesity” or “obesity epidemic”, I refer to the medical understandings of specific bodies as overweight or obese, typically denoted by one’s Body Mass Index (BMI). I view obesity rhetorics as a subset under the umbrella of fatness rhetorics. Obesity discourses refer to the medical problems concerning body weight by focusing on those deemed overweight and obese (those underweight or normal weight need not worry); fatness rhetorics offer a more broad understanding of weight and body size. Although I recognize categories of fatness and obesity can, and do, overlap, these categories become useful in understanding how all body types respond to rhetorics of fatness even if not all respond to the specific subset of rhetorics of obesity. This section outlines rhetorical understandings of bodies in general and specifically fat bodies to set up my overall argument that the fat body stands a public, failed citizen.

### **Rhetoricity of All Bodies**

A rhetorical focus on the body in general, and concerning rhetorics of fatness and obesity in particular, serves as a way to evaluate competing knowledge claims (such as what is fat), by looking to how rhetorics of and about the body serve those arguments. For example, Carra Hood (2005) argued that the media so saturates our understandings of weight, weight loss, fatness, and

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<sup>4</sup> In my analysis, I do not use the terms underweight, normal weight, average weight, or overweight as it presumes a presumption that body weight can, and should, be normalized. The only times I use “overweight” or “obese” are when describing the medical model of understanding of weight or when quoting medicalized rhetorics. Here I draw on Marilyn Wann’s (2009) argument that these terms function problematically: “ ‘Overweight’ is inherently anti-fat. It implies an extreme goal: instead of a bell curve distribution of human weight, it calls for a lone, towering, unlikely bar graph with everyone occupying the same (thin) weights . . . The population is getting taller, but we do not bemoan *overheight* or warn people to keep below, say, five feet eight. Being tall is valued” (p. xii).



obesity that we need to interrogate how meanings shift, by focusing on the question: “How do we remediate competing knowledge claims?” (p. 240). Although Hood did not provide an answer, a rhetorical view of the body does. Knowledge does not exist as pre-determined, abstract, or free-floating, but is instead rhetorically constructed.

However, a rhetorical viewpoint of the body does not deny the material body exists.

Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price (1999) powerfully argued:

To say that the body is a discursive construction is not to deny a substantial corpus, but to insist that our apprehension of it, our understanding of it, is necessarily mediated by the *contexts* in which we speak. . . . It is then the forms of materialisation of the body, rather than the material itself, which is the concern of a feminism that must ask always what purpose and whose interests do particular constructions serve. . . . If the body is not a determinate given, then the political and social structures that take it as such are equally open to transformation. (pp. 7-8)

Adopting a rhetorical orientation to the body enables scholars to explain how bodies are produced (see Jordan, 2004), as well as ways in which activists and/or citizens can change, resist, and/or reproduce normative understandings of the body (for an example of body privilege norms as rhetorical, see Kwan, 2010).

Additionally, rhetorical scholars have recognized the role bodies play as argument; rhetorics of display frequently utilize the body as a means of displaying or bringing forth argument (Prelli, 2006) as well as bodies being the site of argument itself (DeLuca, 1999). Bodies are crafted by communication practices, as well as through the ways we talk *about* bodies. For example, Kevin DeLuca (1999) argued that the bodies of members of Earth First!,

ACT UP, and Queer Nation all become “the site and substance of the argument itself” (p. 10). Although recognizing the fact bodies argue, much body rhetoric literature (DeLuca, 1999; Fabj, 1993; Harold, 1999; Hauser, 1999; Kiewe, 1999; Palczewski, 2002) focused on the body as a resistant body who embodies agency, rather than also interrogating how one’s material body can be used in an argument against her/himself, recasting the individual and his/her body as object, rather than subject (for an example of this type of criticism, see Beerman, 2011).

Being both a subject and an object highlights the conflicting messages and complexities, and how rhetorics of the body and display function on two levels, both revealing and concealing aspects of identity. Outlining the contributions of rhetorics of display Lawrence J. Prelli (2006) explained:

To display is to “show forth” or “make known,” which, in turn, implies its opposite—to conceal. That dynamic between revealing and concealing . . . is the core presumption behind rhetorical studies of display. . . . [which explores] how those situated resolutions conceal even as they reveal, what meanings they leave absent even as they make others present, whose interests they mute as well as whose they emphasize, what they condemn as well as celebrate, and so on. This is so regardless of whether those rhetorics are enunciated through speech, . . . depicted visually, . . . or enacted through exhibitions, demonstrations, or performances. (p. 11)

When analyzing notions of the body, it then becomes important to analyze both what is said/revealed as well as what is unstated/concealed. In this way, rhetorics of display function similarly to Kenneth Burke’s (1966) notion of terministic screens. As Kenneth Burke (1966) argued, terministic screens operate to both reveal and obscure: “Even if any given terminology is a

*reflection* of reality, by its very nature as terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality” (p. 45). All rhetoric necessarily emphasizes certain selections which always deflect other parts. An objective reality or unified body does not exist; instead, what constitutes reality and bodies are mediated through selections, reflections, and deflections, what is revealed as well as obscured.

Therefore, public displays of bodies, and indeed which *types* of bodies exist on display, become central questions. Who is present and who is absent are not merely descriptive or by circumstance. Instead, it reflects societal values about who counts as worthy of representation, and by extension, who does not (Butler, 2004), which implicates how advocacy functions, and who can be an advocate (Hesford & Kozol, 2005). The notion of an acceptable body does not exist in isolation to a particular category, but works in conjunction with other social markers. For example, fatness intersects with ideologies of class, race, and gender. Definitions of fatness also are communally defined. In this way, rhetorics concerning fatness and obesity work together with other social categories. Amy Erdman Farrell (2011) succinctly stated: “Fat denigration works in complicated ways to reinforce the existence of sexism, homophobia, and all other processes by which our culture categorizes and oppresses people through bodily hierarchies and stigmatization” (p. 136). Regardless of the particular type of oppression, much of it remains rhetorically connected to the body and what society deems appropriately displayed and shown. Body discourses are invested in normalizing appropriate body norms: “One of the most powerful ways in which bodies are given meaning is through the sociocultural significance according to body weight” (Markula, Burns, & Riley, 2008, p. 1). Moving from an understanding of the body

in general as rhetorical, I now turn to feminist and cultural understandings of the fat body in particular.

### **Fat as a Feminist Issue**

Feminist theory has long theorized the body, including the political, social, cultural, and material body (see, de Beauvoir, 1989; Firestone, 1970; Irigaray, 1989). The body operates as a complex rhetorical construction and serves as an important vehicle for attention and analysis. Norms of femininity and the body intersect, with a central focus on appearance and attractiveness: “Normative femininity is coming more and more to be centered on woman’s body — not its duties and obligations or even its capacity to bear children, but its sexuality, and more precisely, its presumed heterosexuality and its appearance” (Bartky, 1990, p. 80). Thus, women increasingly are judged on how they look, and to what degree they meet societal standards of size and weight.

However, not all bodies are represented equally in U.S. culture and some are absent from dominant discourses (Casper & Moore, 2009). Within feminist theory, although the idea exists that fat is a feminist issue, critical attention to the fat body remains an underdeveloped area of analysis. One of the first to explicitly theorize fat as a feminist issue was Susie Orbach, with her 1978 book entitled *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, which was followed by her 1982 book entitled *Fat is a Feminist Issue II: A Program to Conquer Compulsive Eating*. However, as the subtitle to her second book suggests, her works focused on individual emotions, beliefs, and eating habits, rather than focusing on larger systems of attitudes, beliefs, and structures. Orbach focused on avoiding compulsive eating in order to avoid weight gain. Thus, she suggested managing one’s body via eating so that one would not receive fatphobic comments from others; the system which

produces such fatphobia was not challenged. Indeed, the idea of a program to conquer compulsive eating fit within the idea that bodies and physical appearance remain completely within one's control; a fat body then would demonstrate being out of control.

The fear of fatness functioned as a common way for some feminists to analyze the spectrum of body types, the logic being that a woman becomes anorexic or bulimic due to a fear of fatness (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012b; Saguy, 2012). In this way, fatness and fat people did not exist as categories worthy of analysis but instead as a by-product. Abigail C. Saguy (2012) summarized this trend in the fat as feminist issue:

For a host of other U.S. feminist scholars, including Susan Bordo, Naomi Wolf, Jean Kilbourne and others, fat is a feminist issue because the fear of becoming fat terrorizes so many women, many of whom suffer from poor body image and some of whom succumb to anorexia or bulimia . . . This is arguably the dominant line of research among work examining fat as a feminist issue. (p. 601)

Here fatness as a feminist cause again focuses on the corporeal body and its weightiness. Recent trends in feminist scholarship which focus on the individual rather than systemic attitudes, beliefs, and institutions which perpetuate fatness as a problem discourses also contribute to overlooking fat as a feminist issue (Roehling, 2012).

Attitudes of fatness center on three key themes of fatness rhetoric, including: (1) the fat body is read within rhetorics of excess and lack of control; (2) media frames individuals in the image that it wants, rather than individuals actively creating their own image; and (3) the fat body is seen as grotesque, and thus undesirable (Ross & Moorti, 2005, pp. 83-4). Although within the media there has also been an increase in the number of portrayals of fat people, a mere

increase in quantity does not automatically mean more quality. As Giovanelli and Ostertag (2009) argued, there are two key ways to think about media representation; first, in terms of quantity and second, in terms of quality: “The quantitative focus pertains to frequency and asks *how often* social groups are represented in the media; the qualitative focus asks, When social groups are represented in the media, *how are they portrayed?*” (p. 290). With regards to fat individuals, an absence of a positive view of the fat body remains; instead, fat women, and men, often are the “targets of humor or pity” (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012a, p. 587). This absence of fat-positive ideas likely stems from the pathologizing of fat within U.S. culture, including the selling of anti-fat attitudes (see Young, 2005).

Perhaps part of the reason why mainstream feminist theory has not regarded the fat body stems from the idea that one’s body should be under one’s control, even if the amount of control varies. Certain social positions are culturally understood as unable to change, such as race, age, disability, which enable coalitional advocacy and theorization. One’s body, and the level of fatness, is culturally understood as “something we can improve if we try (e.g., makeup, diets, cosmetic surgery, exercise) [which] make[s] fat women seem less deserving of social activists’ attention” (Chrisler, 2012, p. 613). This theme of control also can stem from the idea that fatness is otherized. As thin bodies represent classical understandings of beauty and normalcy, the fat body then became situated in ugliness, freakery, and unruliness; being fat “evokes horror. . . fat people are often perceived as having mental, emotional, or even moral impairments” (Dennett, 1996, p. 323).

Although who embodies freakery varies across time and within cultures, Leslie Fiedler (1978) argued freaks are not “of nature” but instead “a freak of culture” (p. xvii), which in the

United States included the Fat Boy, the Fat Man and Fat Woman in the role of freak at the circus during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And indeed, fat people in the circus were very common and popular, so much so that “a few carnivals carried sideshows made up exclusively of extremely heavy people” (Bogdan, 1996, p. 32). Thus, fatness culturally was understood as abnormal and out of bounds of normal behavior. The freak shows of circuses largely are a thing of the past. However, the cultural impulses which drove people to view fat bodies on display in the circus remain in current discourses.

The cultural freak establishes relationships between normal and abnormal, the livable and unlivable, the habitable and the uninhabitable. The body itself becomes the grounds on which these dichotomies diverge. Andrea Stulman Dennett (1996) succinctly argued freak shows place bodies on display to demonstrate social norms:

The freak show is about relationships: *us* versus *them*, the normal versus the freaks. It is about culture, which determines what is freakish and what is not. It is about the human body and society’s perception of normal and abnormal. . . . But most importantly, it is about people on display and . . . public examination. (p. 325)

The fat body as freak is then presented as a broken or dangerous body and threat to both the individual fat person and larger public. As contemporary society obsesses about body size, individuals become well-versed in reading bodies as freaks: “In fat-obsessed cultures we are all ‘lipoliterates’ who ‘read’ fat for what we believe it tells us about a person. This includes not only their moral character but also their health” (Graham, 2005, pp. 178-179).

Similarly to freaks, the trope of the unruly woman operates outside of the norms of beauty and decency by rejecting them. Kathleen K. Rowe (1997) succinctly summarized this

trope, as “a topos of female outrageousness and transgression” (p. 75). The unruly woman is linked with excess and a lack of control, both of which serve as defining characteristics of the fat body. Indeed, the unruly body can also be read as a grotesque body, which contains the markers of “a performance of parody, excess, and gender masquerade, is a potentially productive strategy for feminist intervention into the category ‘woman’ ” (Reed, 1997, p. 132). Additionally, the unruly woman and the grotesque body stand in as opposites to the cult of true womanhood and the classical body, respectively (Russo, 1986, p. 219). Because such bodies and behaviors challenge and blur the boundaries between what constitutes acceptable behavior, the unruly women functions as an ambivalent and transgressive woman, which can be read with disgust and delight; “her social power is unclear” (Rowe, 1997, p. 76). However, as Janet Wolff (2003) explained, the power of the grotesque or unruly woman can be co-opted by the status quo narratives or dominant frames: “the excesses and reversals of the carnivalesque often operate to reaffirm the status quo, providing licensed but limited occasions for transgressions which are guaranteed to be neutralized” (p. 418). My goal in this dissertation is to tease out the contradictions and possibilities of the fat body relative to understandings of good bodies performing good citizenship. In this way, I view my work as answering Kathleen LeBesco and Jana Evans Braziel’s (2001) challenge to critics to create work which does an “unmasking [of] the fat body, rendering it visible and present, rather than invisible and absent: seen, rather than unsightly” (p. 1). To do so, I situate the rhetorical, feminist, and fat activist understandings of the body within a lens of bodies as rhetorical and visual.



## Rhetorical Construction of Fat Bodies

Fat and fatness do not exist as stable or pre-existent categories, but we create such understandings through rhetoric. Kathleen LeBesco and Jana Evans Braziel (2001) eloquently summarized this position: “Our perception of fat is not natural—that it is a function of our historical and cultural positioning” (pp. 2-3). Part of what makes fatness an unstable category is the embodiment of fatness within corporeal forms. Reading bodies and discourses about bodies become a messy and complicated matter. Tensions and various ways of reading bodies demonstrates cultural attitudes about said bodies. Bodies do not contain a singular, universal meaning because the subtitles and subtexts change based upon who does the reading. There is no universal understanding of “fat means x” or “fat = x” written on any particular body, but our understandings of what constitutes fatness and its meanings are rhetorically constructed, and thus open to change and revision. Understandings of fatness in particular do not exist as fixed but fluctuate based upon social narratives (Duncan, 2008; Farrell, 2011).

Take two recent examples of Baltimore Ravens cheerleader Courtney Lenz (Figure 1) and New Jersey governor Chris Christie (Figure 2).<sup>5</sup> First, five year veteran Baltimore Ravens cheerleader Lenz argued the organization prohibited her from cheering for the Ravens at the Superbowl because her slight weight fluctuation, an increase between one to two pounds, deemed her too fat to serve as a representative cheerleader (see Access Hollywood, 2013; Chase, 2013; Dailey, 2013). In many ways, her case of weight gain resulting in loss of benefits (in this case, cheering at the Super Bowl) functioned similarly to the earlier cases of Michigan Hooters

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<sup>5</sup> I included pictures of Lenz and Christie as I did not want to presume readers’ familiarity with these individuals. When selecting images, I chose images that were roughly similar in the amount of Lenz and Christie’s bodies being displayed as well from roughly the same time period as when these stories were circulating in early 2013.

server Cassandra Smith and the 2011 Miss San Antonio, TX Domonique Ramirez (see Beerman, 2011; Inbar, 2011), both of whom lost their position due to perceived or actual weight gain.

Second, women are not the only ones who face scrutiny because of their weight, as Chris Christie demonstrated. In February of 2013, Dr. Connie Mariano, a Former White House



Figure 1: Baltimore Ravens cheerleader Courtney Lenz  
Image from  
BaltimoreRavens.com

physician, publicly announced her concern of New Jersey Governor Christie's weight and fitness for continuing in office. The following headlines offered a brief overview concerning Christie's fitness for office, potential health complications, and Christie's own admission he should lose weight: "Former WH doc on Christie: 'I'm worried about this man dying in office,'" "Physician tells CNN Chris Christie's weight is 'ticking time bomb,'" "Governor Chris Christie not fit to be President," and "Christie: Doing best I can to lose weight" (see Acosta, 2013; Hall, 2103; Siebold, 2013; Camina, 2013 respectively). Such headlines were not surprising given that

speculation abounded in the fall of 2011 concerning whether Christie would, or should, run for the presidency of the United States; the press frequently commented on his weight. Headlines such as the following were common: "Is Chris Christie too fat to squeeze into the Oval Office?" (Del Signor, 2011). Although qualifications such as experience and voting records were considered in this article, the title centered on weight, physical appearance, and fitness for office

—linking weight with job performance. Norman Ornstein, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, commented on the link between fiscal and political discipline alongside bodily discipline: “It’s a little bit hard to talk about fiscal discipline when you appear not to have a lot of self-discipline” (as cited in Groer, 2011, para. 20). The lack of self-control became



Figure 2: New Jersey Governor Chris Christie; Image from *Telegraph, UK*

comedy punchlines. At the annual White House Correspondents Association dinner late April 2012, Jimmy Kimmel commented on Governor Christine’s weight by using First Lady Michelle Obama’s anti-obesity campaign. After stating that Obama just wants us to be healthy with her *Let’s Move!* campaign, he joking stated to the First Lady: “Look, it’s Chris Christie, get him!” This line was followed by the following punchline: “Ya know they say that inside every

American governor is a president struggling to get out. In Chris Christie's case it's the only one where you can still hear him screaming” (Katz, 2012, paras. 2-3). These examples from news media, Ornstein, and Kimmel all demonstrate a connection between one’s weight (and control or lack thereof) and appropriate public identity. The two examples of Courtney Lenz and Chris Christie from February 2013 both illustrated that in the contemporary United States, individuals frequently face judgment on their physical appearance, especially one’s weight. Although their bodies look very different, with Lenz’s BMI likely within the normal range and Christie’s likely within the obese range, both were labelled “fat,” demonstrating how fatness becomes rhetorically constituted within communities.

### **Bodies as Public Identity**

Examining rhetorics of fatness and obesity offers insights into the cultural norms and dominant understandings of accepted identities (see LeBesco, 2004; Farrell, 2011). As the 1999 edited collection *Weighty Issues: Fatness and Thinness as Social Problems* noted, the body is no longer solely an individual concern but a public one (Sobal & Maurer, 1999). Regardless of how one defines crossing the line between appropriate and inappropriate weight, public concern abounds. The public anxiety and political concern centering on weight related topics is evidenced by the following recent events: popular culture discussions concerning weight and fatness in film and television (such as NBC’s *The Biggest Loser* and Lifetime’s *Drop Dead Diva*); efforts to obtain FDA approval for obesity pills (see Edney & Peterson, 2012); and public policies and surrounding discourse, such as new regulations on caloric intake nationwide in public school cafeteria’s lunches and a cap on the sizes of carbonated, sugary beverages in New York (see USDA, 2012 and Lerner, 2012 respectively). Thus, scientific, medical, and political communities

“managed to convince a significant percentage of the population that they should think and worry a great deal about their own and other people’s body weight” (Gard, 2011, p. 5). These discourses take form within the overall context of rhetorics of the obesity epidemic (for more on the epidemic metaphor, see Mitchell & McTigue, 2007).

Although statistically the numbers of those with obesity in the United States decreased in the first decade of twenty-first century, the rhetoric of a problem continues. Michael Gard, long time critic of obesity rhetoric and associate professor of physical education at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, argued we should recognize the end of the obesity epidemic in his 2011 book of the same title. Gard argued the epidemic of obesity is over for three reasons: (1) evidence that obesity rates are leveling and/or decreasing; (2) policymakers adopted rhetoric of a crisis to demonstrate action against the problem while also doing very little; and (3) the backlash against such framing largely goes unanswered (2011, pp. 12-13). Rhetorics of obesity demonstrate that even with the facts Gard outlined, a larger framing an obesity epidemic precludes these facts from rising to the level of public awareness and consciousness. The facts bounce off due to a larger cultural framing of fatness as the problem (for more on framing, see Lakoff, 2004). The dominant framing of fatness centers on fat as a problem, in terms of aesthetics, morality, and health. Amy Farrell (2011) analyzed the discourses of fatness beginning with the middle of the nineteenth century through today. She argued the framing of fatness as an individualized moral failing began in the nineteenth century and continues today by linking individual failings within a health context. She wrote, “the connotations of fatness and of the fat person—lazy, gluttonous, greedy, immoral, uncontrolled, stupid, ugly, and lacking in will power—preceded and then were intertwined with explicit concern about health issues” (p. 4).

Regardless of statistical numbers, potential government inaction, and criticism of such framing, the centuries wide attitudes regarding fatness as a problem overwhelm the three reasons Gard argued the epidemic is over.

Fatness as a problem then exists as a matter for public concern. Rhetoric of publicness matters to understandings of enacting citizenship. Michael Warner (2002) argued that publics exist “only by virtue of their imagining it” (p. 8), including a “social imaginary” (p. 12). He continued, arguing that publics exist when addressed by the people: “When people address publics, they engage in struggles . . . over the conditions that bring them together as a public” (p. 12). From the imagined must then come the enactment of that public, to move from ideal to embodied practice. Lauren Berlant (1997) argued citizenship does not just constitute an idea, but an enactment of those ideas: “To live fully both the ordinariness and sublimity of national identity, one must be capable not just of imagining, but of managing being an American” (p. 25). Thus, even if individuals know the norms of citizenship, their bodies stand as material, visual evidence against their enactment of good citizenship, demonstrating that they have failed a key test or key component within their body. The fat body fails to embody appropriate citizenship, and roots that within the physical, corporeal form of the body itself. These bodies stand in as failed citizens, as they have failed to master the ability to self-regulate and control their bodily presentation. In this way, fat bodies are seen to fail the enactment of appropriate citizenship. Therefore, citizenship does not merely exist as an ideal, but is enacted through rhetoric and bodies.

## **Bodies as Visual Rhetoric**

Extending previous thematics of the fat body, my dissertation investigates the following central question: In the United States, how does the concept of appropriate/good and regulation of inappropriate/bad corporeal body become rhetorically constituted and enacted as a public identity? I argue public identity becomes defined and enacted through the visualization of the body as an extension of a consumptive model of identity. Not only do we consume goods, products, and services to demonstrate and enact identities, now our corporeal bodies visually display our identities to ourselves and others. The body stands in as a synecdochical representative of the nation, and more specifically, that thin rather than fat bodies constitute appropriate or legitimate forms of public identity display. Citizenship and identity become contained through the visuals of the fat/non-fat body.

Visual rhetoric does not simply mean images and pictures, but includes a wide array of rhetoric; some even call this move a pictorial turn (Mitchell, 1994). Visual rhetoric begins with the assumption that “visuality is not distinct from, but rather fully integrated in, our practices of everyday persuasion” (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008a, p. xvi). Examples of such everyday forms of persuasion include “the totality of practices, performances, and configurations of the visual” (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008a, p. xvii). Images, bodies, and visual representations do not simply exist as part of a naturalized world, but instead images circulate within a logic of ideology; “ideologies permeate the world of entertainment, and images are also used for regulation, categorization, identification, and evidence” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 22). Thus, not only do visuals persuade, they exist as ideological.

Although visual rhetoric has more recently come into prominence among rhetorical scholars, Lester C. Olson, Cara A. Finnegan, and Diane S. Hope (2008b) argued images and visuals have always been important, “in *every* historical period,” and thus urged for scholars to recognize “public images often work in ways that are rhetorical; that is, they function to persuade” (p. 1). I agree with Olson, Finnegan, and Hope that visuals not only persuade but also help to create U.S. culture and ideology; scholars should study visual rhetoric in ways that “help us understand how we perform, see, remember, memorialize, confront, resist, consume, commodify, authorize, and govern in U.S. culture” (2008b, p. 2).

### **Text Selection and Justification**

For this dissertation, I selected texts from contemporary rhetorics of fatness and obesity from 2010-2013 which articulate a public identity for fat individuals, both children and adults, which utilized visual rhetoric to create that identity. Also, all texts contribute to understandings of the intersection between fatness and motherhood. Thus, my three case studies for this dissertation include Michelle Obama and the *Let's Move!* campaign, the state of Georgia's Strong4Life campaign, and the I Stand Against Weight Bullying tumblr as all three offer ways to understand the public identities of fatness and motherhood. Many discourses abound concerning contemporary understandings of fatness, as demonstrated previously. However, these three case studies offer insights into the *publicness* of all individuals through the lens of fatness, obesity, and motherhood that other contemporary rhetorics do not, again emphasizing the importance of studying public identities.

Additionally, all three cases enable a focus on rhetorics about and of the body as a way to investigate visual rhetoric. I argue such a perspective enables scholars to see how bodies and



rhetorical discourse co-exist, as Judith Butler argued “discourses do actually live in bodies. . . . bodies in fact carry discourses as part of their own lifeblood” (as cited in Meijer & Prins, 1998, n.p.). More specifically, as I am interested in the ideologies of citizenship, the body serves as an appropriate viewpoint; indeed, “ideology is regarded as being both inscribed upon and constituted by bodies” (Lockford, 2004, p. 32). These three public campaigns relied on visuals of and about the body to evaluate what U.S. contemporary culture advocates should be done regarding such bodies. Visual campaigns are particularly important as ways to evaluate advocacy. Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol (2005) wrote *Just Advocacy?*, focusing on how images justify U.S. foreign policy and human rights policies. Extending understandings of how advocacy campaigns work, they argued: “How visual and textual rhetorics mobilize human rights claims—how experiences of violation and suffering are represented, by whom, in what venues, and for which audiences—is profoundly important in the politics of advocacy” (p. 22). I take up this part of their argument and extend it, arguing visuals help to close geographical and ideological proximity gaps. Visual rhetoric, then, serves as an exigence that calls for attention. Lloyd Bitzer (1980) noted, “an exigence near in term and place generates more interest than a distant one” (p. 32). Within the dominant rhetorics of fatness and obesity in the U.S. which label fatness as a cultural, social, and/or medical problem, visuals help to bring home the message and make it relevant for all people, regardless of size. For those who counter such dominant framings, and most particularly for fat activists, focusing on the body as a source of empowerment, being out, fat and proud, showcases exigency as well: Fat bodies are here to stay.

Within the specific case studies, I assembled various texts for analysis. Chapter three on Michelle Obama and *Let's Move!* drew on media footage (such as television and radio talk

shows), news reports about the campaign, her involvement, and her body, and promotional material from the campaign itself. Chapter four on Georgia's Strong4Life campaign used campaign materials from its website, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook page. Chapter five on the I Stand Against Weight Bullying Tumblr located the primary text as two of the 333 images from the Tumblr and also used an image from Facebook which did not appear in the Tumblr.

For each case study, when assembling the text for analysis, I drew on the theoretical perspective of Michael Calvin McGee's fragmentation of texts and assembled these particular case studies to demonstrate a publicness regarding fat identity and how fatness interplays with motherhood. McGee's (1990) essay entitled "Text, context, and the fragmentation of contemporary culture" detailed the changing nature of society and thus the nature of what constitutes a "text." As a "fractured and fragmented American culture" exists, there is not a universal set of knowledge that all Americans know; rather, the knowledge is fragmented across various elements within the culture (McGee, 1990, p. 286). Emanating from this disunity of public knowledge is the fragmentation of the process by which we come to understand texts. In this way, an isolated text does not tell the whole story, but rather it is a piece of another story, a piece in the larger puzzle. For example, someone could argue that these campaigns merely comment on the medical nature of an obesity problem; however, I argue that they rhetorically justify certain public identities over others, including what it means to have an appropriately judged body in terms of weight and motherhood.

McGee's (1990) notion of fragments is useful in understanding modern day texts, and for this dissertation in particular. There is not one moment when an isolated text occurs; rather, it

begins and continues elsewhere. When choosing a “text” or “texts” to study, a critic does not start with *the* text already constituted, but rather s/he constitutes it and calls it into being:

With rhetoric as a master term, we begin by noticing that rhetors *make* discourses from scraps and pieces of evidence. Critical rhetoric does not *begin* with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather, texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent. The apparently finished discourse is in fact a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made. It is fashioned from what we can call “fragments.” (McGee, 1990, p. 279)

A text exists as just a part, a fragment of a larger whole (which may or may not be cohesive). The fragments, when looked at together, tell a larger story than their individual parts. McGee (1990) noted that a fragment both represents a larger discourse while also implicating that discourse:

“The fragment is a sign that consists of a signifier (the whole discourse it represents) and a signified (the meaning we are urged to see in the whole discourse)” (p. 280). When looking at the various rhetorics of fatness and obesity, it is important to recognize that the various press statements, interviews, media campaigns, images, and so on are all fragments of a larger whole. Since not all texts agree or approach rhetorics of fatness and obesity in similar ways, it would be easy to say that some discourses are more important than others. Such an approach can miss how the texts speak to each other, or how the various fragments (the individual rhetorical artifacts) speak to each other and illuminate the broader scope of the fat body in the contemporary United States. It is useful to analyze how seemingly different rhetorics are mutually reinforcing fragments of discourse, which contribute to a larger understanding of the fat body.

Therefore, it is up to the critic to create their own unique methodological framework, and to “identify touchstones or models that fit the constellation of perspectives, methods, eras, discourses, social practices, theories, and purposes that we have for doing criticism. . . . [and b]ecome a participant in them” (Berkowitz, 2003, p. 363). The case studies within my dissertation challenge rhetorical scholars to think about the intersections of multiple lines of scholarship and theoretical perspectives. Although all cases include a level of complexity, rhetorics of fatness and obesity involve a particularly complex intersection of rhetorics, bringing together body and visual rhetorics, medicalized narratives, and motherhood narratives. Thus, it points to the need for scholars to not only aware of the intersectionality of discourses, but also to use a complex, intersectional approach in their own work. Here I parallel feminist theory’s line of scholarship on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; King, 1988). Intersectionality theory developed as a response to an additive approach to experience and victimization, whereby one could determine how much oppression one faced by adding up socially negative identities. Instead, feminist critics argue for recognition of multiple aspects of identity, which always constitute each other. For rhetorical theory and criticism, scholars should pay more attention to the ways various vectors of scholarship coalesce and crystallize in discourse formations, particularly for those who accept Michael C. McGee’s (1990) notion of a fragmented text, which necessitates drawing from a larger pool of discourse to construct a text for analysis in the first place. For the purposes of this study, I draw on the conversations of rhetorical understandings of the body, visual rhetoric, and public identities, including the role of appropriate woman and mother.

## Dissertation Overview

Overall, all three case studies demonstrate how rhetorics of and about the fat body construct the identity of good citizen and good mother. As outlined in this first chapter, the body, and visualizations of the body, serve as a way read appropriate consumption/citizenship and weight operates as a key way to see that literal consumption. I continue this argument in subsequent chapters. Chapter two develops my heuristic vocabulary by outlining rhetorical methodology and argues that U.S. citizenship is now commonly understood as consumptive bodily citizenship, where one's body, or one's child's body, communicates their civic standing. Chapter three analyzes First Lady Michelle Obama as advocate for the *Let's Move!* campaign and her personal and bodily forms of advocacy. The two opposing readings of her body (toned arms versus big butt) demonstrate both appropriate and inappropriate consumption, demonstrating how advocacy and citizenship become intertwined, as well as the individualizing of her motherhood experiences as ways to understand Obama as enacting appropriate citizenship as First Lady and as a Black woman. Chapter four analyzes the state of Georgia's Strong4Life campaign and argued it created unlivable identities for children and thus their mothers. S4L's rhetoric argued fat children are unlivable because of their fatness, their consumption choices, and blamed mothers. By narrowing of all factors of identity and "good" mothering to a child's weight, the oversimplification enables rhetorical violence and showcases the dangers of consumptive citizenship. Chapter five analyzes the I Stand Against Weight Bullying campaign which critiqued the Georgia's campaign but also redefined fat identity and motherhood by articulating alternative conceptions of good civic identity and motherhood through resistance and alternative connotation(s) of the fat body. I Stand as a whole rejects the notion that fat body

demonstrates inappropriate consumption and an inappropriate citizen. Instead, it offers a way to read fat bodies as subjects (rather than unlivable or objects) who can consume, be healthy, and happy. Finally, Chapter six concludes with my implications for public identities decided by visualizations of the body.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF CONSUMPTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Rhetoric is all around us, and encompasses all that we as humans think, do, and act.

Although I recognize that any definition of rhetoric is not only difficult (Jasinski, 2001) but may be a wrong question to start with (Hariman, 1986), I define rhetoric as the art and practice of communication. These practices include symbol use and persuasion (Burke, 1969; see also, Scott, 1973), with the recognition that rhetoric constitutes our reality (for example, see McGee's (1975) analysis of how rhetoric of "the people" constituted that social group; see also Charland, 1987). In other words, rhetoric operates as constitutive of reality, of identities, and of knowledge. The study of rhetoric should not focus on the intent of a rhetor; as Robert L. Scott (1973) noted, intentionality cannot be determined. By using the example of someone at a party stating, "my glass is empty," Scott argued multiple different interpretations exist, and intent not only becomes unknowable, but asks a wrong question altogether. Instead, rhetorical analysis should turn its critical edge towards on symbol use, persuasion, and constitutive elements of discourse.

However, taking a critical look at how such rhetoric operates and functions is not a clear-cut path. There is not a singular, pre-programmed methodology as rhetorical criticisms "reject the uniform application of predetermined formulas, which are most likely to produce scholarship that is dull, mechanical, unimaginative, and commonplace" (Lucas, 1981, p. 16). Instead, there is an inventional component to criticism, whereby the critic takes up the rhetorical artifact and continually revises one's understanding based upon what is occurring within the artifact. In this sense, rhetorical criticism is not ploddingly methodical, but instead an organic, evolving process between the critic and the artifact: "Good criticism does not result from doggedly following a set

of formulary procedures, but from the full, free interplay of intelligence with the critical object” (Lucas, 1981, p. 16). Thus, a rhetorical “method” is a broad concept, referring “to the general procedures by which various kinds of scholars go about their work” (Lucas, 1981, p. 17).

These general procedures are best thought as critical heuristic vocabularies instead of a singular, unified, systematic methodological approach to rhetorical studies or criticism. Just as there are multiple ways that one person can look at a situation, so too are there multiple ways to evaluate a rhetorical artifact. In their 1994 edited collection entitled *Critical Questions*, William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary A. Copeland, argued that rhetorical criticism while not seen as a traditional method, still has a methodological approach through developing heuristic vocabularies:

These approaches do not really qualify as “methods,” in any meaningful sense, to begin with. They are more properly conceptual heuristics or vocabularies; they may invite a critic to interesting ways of reading a text, but they do not have the procedural rigor or systematicity that typically characterizes a method. In fact, it is arguable that they are at their best, critically, when they are least rigorous “methodologically.” (1994b, pp. 39-40)

Thus, rhetorical methods use heuristic vocabularies to interpret the meanings behind, within, or surrounding rhetorical artifacts, instead of a method that may be more easily replicated.

The rhetorical process usually begins when a critic is intrigued by a rhetorical artifact, which then prompts the critic to ask certain questions(s) about the artifact. In this way, rhetorical analysis functions as a way to explain “how rhetoric works. A critic asks a question about a rhetorical process or phenomenon and how it works and provides a tentative answer to the question” (Foss, 2004, p. 9). Indeed, in rhetorical criticism the critic frequently asks the reader to



look at something from a different angle or perspective: “It takes up a text and re-circulates it, that is, ‘says’ or ‘does’ that text differently, and asks the listener or reader to re-understand and re-evaluate the text, to see and judge it in new ways suggested by the critic” (Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland, 1994a, p. 3). This process of questioning and working through the artifact to find an answer is not a scientific one, but one which may take unexpected turns: “In short, criticism is not a science, but an art. It is not a scientific method; it uses subjective methods of argument; it exists on its own, not in conjunction with other methods of generating knowledge (i.e., social)” (Kuypers, 2005, p. 15). Thus, there is not one “correct” way to approach rhetorical studies, but instead rhetorical methodology calls on the critic to develop a heuristic vocabulary with which to talk about the artifact(s) at hand. Like other forms of art, the critic ultimately plays a large role in how the finished product of analysis evolved over time. To understand my organic process of criticism, I explain why rhetorical criticism matters, establishing the importance of this method and then outline the key theoretical perspectives for this dissertation, which I have labelled as consumptive citizenship.

### **The Critic and Rhetorical Analysis**

It is impossible for any researcher to totally distance themselves from their object of study; no one can be *tabula rasa*, not bringing some ideological underpinnings to their study. In every method, including quantitative, qualitative, and rhetorical, each researcher or critic brings their own preconceived notions of the world to bear on the subject(s) they study. Each critic is intimately involved in the research process, as rhetorical criticism “actively involves the personality of the researcher. The very choices of what to study, and how and why to study a rhetorical artifact, are heavily influenced by the personal qualities of the researcher” (Kuypers,

2005, pp. 14-15). It is almost impossible to separate oneself from the topic at hand, because of the intimate connections that drew one to the rhetorical artifact in the first place.

Reality is seen through different social locations because of the way that human beings process the world. Discourse focuses our attention one way rather than another, and what events mean is already mediated by how one speaks or writes about that event. Kenneth Burke's theory of terministic screens is a useful concept to understand this idea. In *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke (1966) described terministic screens as being composed of reflections, selections, and deflections of reality: "Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (p. 45). Reality is not composed of only one element, but necessarily includes all three elements. Each idea emphasizes certain reflections which always deflect other parts, obscuring the entire picture.

In this way, Burke challenged the very notion of an objective reality, instead recognizing that what constitutes reality is mediated by what is selected, reflected, and deflected. The rhetoric that a speaker uses acts as a filter for the audience's understanding of that topic: "These human responses (rhetoric) constitute a filter for 'facts' which translates them into *beliefs*" (McGee, 1975, p. 248). What we as humans take to be objective facts are really belief statements, in that discourse directs us to see the world one way as opposed to another, which is itself an implicit judgment on certain types of worldviews. Thus, when evaluating a text, the rhetor has already constructed a worldview through the discourse in the text. When studying a text, it is important to recognize that a critic "sees material forces, events, and themes in history *only as they have*

*already been mediated or filtered by the Leader whose words he [sic] studies*” (McGee, 1975, p. 249). In this way, discourse always acts as a filter for knowledge and understanding.

All rhetoric exhorts individuals to be something rather than another. Directing one’s attention one way rather than another is a value judgment. Edwin Black described how language calls humans to be something: “In all rhetorical discourse, we can find enticements not simply to believe something, but to *be* something. We are solicited by discourse to fulfill its brandishments with our very selves” (1970, p. 119). In this way, language is not a neutral way to evaluate people, events, and worldviews, but instead acts to create the world around us. Only by recognizing this function of language is it possible to move to a deeper understanding of how a text functions.

No one can be entirely objective when evaluating any type of data. The goal, however, of rhetorical studies is not to persuade the reader that the critic is correct, but rather to further “enhance understandings of others concerning the rhetorical artifact” (Kuypers, 2005a, p. 17). The distinction between persuasion and understanding is critical because it allows critics more free reign in developing their own position concerning the text. My goal within this dissertation is not to persuade reader(s) that my argument concerning rhetorics of fatness and obesity is the sole interpretation; rather, it is to illuminate the texts in such a way as to provide a richer, fuller understanding of how they operate.

Ultimately, there is no universal rhetorical methodological perspective, as instead “there are multiple conversations out there” (Berkowitz, 2003, p. 363). Therefore, it is up to the critic to create their own specific methodological framework, based upon the individual artifact under study: “Whatever particular orientation, approach, or perspective an individual critic elects is not

prescribed beforehand, but depends upon the purposes of the critic and the nature of the rhetorical work under scrutiny” (Lucas, 1981, p. 16). Although the lack of rigorous methodology may be frustrating for some, the strength in rhetorical analysis is the ability to be vastly encompassing as well as pushing the rhetorical critic to create something unique and specific for their rhetorical artifact. This is also true of the fact that generally such criticisms are political. The danger lies not the fact that they are political, but instead that the critic does not acknowledge their own political leanings and instead appear as “neutral.”

### **Individualizing Citizenship**

Moving from an understanding of bodies as rhetorical, persuasive, and exigency for advocacy as well as understanding how bodies enact citizenship as outlined in Chapter one, I now turn to how the rhetorical nature of bodies intersects with and also constitutes our understandings of citizenship as individualized and consumptive. Rather than being static, notions of citizenship change over time. Michael Schudson (1998) outlined four historical periods, including colonial citizenship of social hierarchy (restrictions on voting based upon sex, race, and property status), mass political participation citizenship (extension of suffrage), the informed citizen (an informed public would then make informed decisions), and the rights-bearing citizen (emphasizing the individual’s rights). Currently, the rights-bearing or individual citizen remains prominent. Rather than viewing individuals as part of popular democracy with civic responsibilities (such as voting, political participation, and the rights, privileges and duties stemming from such an understanding), the model now is personalized. As Matthew A. Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg (2002) noted, the government no longer unifies a group of individuals into a public but treats them as “a collection of private citizens” (p. x), and specifically that of

consumer. Moving from a civic or community focus to an individualized focus blurs the lines between public and private: Understandings of citizenship as societal or communal are reduced while the private lives of individuals become increasingly important. Joshua Meyrowitz (2006) called this move the “*collaborative construction of intimacy*, where politicians, the media, and the public are all focusing more on the personal dimensions of politics” (p. 384). What one does in private becomes part of personal citizenship, flipping the 1960s feminist slogan that the personal is political into the political is personalized; politics then “should feel ‘empowering’ ” (Crenson & Ginsberg, 2002, p. 7). Within this frame, a critical way to enact personalized citizenship is through one’s personal choices, such as consumption of goods and services.

In the private or personal view of democracy, the role of the U.S. government then becomes much different than other conceptualizations of citizenship. Lauren Berlant (1997) argued the changing nature of citizenship contained implications for national identity: “Downsizing citizenship to a mode of voluntarism and privacy has radically changed the ways national identity is imagined, experienced, and governed in political and mass-media public spheres and in everyday life” (p. 5).<sup>6</sup> More specifically, rather than focusing on government to make changes, the agent of action becomes individuals, and the government’s role is to support those individuals. Rather than petitioning or demanding the government to make a change, individuals instead satisfy their own desires and needs. Crenson and Ginsberg (2002) stated: “Rather than make demands of government, we now fulfill them ourselves, and in doing so we

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<sup>6</sup> Although Berlant (1997) and Crenson and Ginsberg (2002) used the metaphor of democracy or citizenship being “downsized,” I chose not to use this metaphor in my own analysis. I agree with Schudson’s (1998) argument that citizenship and political participation is not in decline but rather in transition, change, or flux, as well as Bennett’s (2009) argument that citizenship functions as fluid. Additionally, as elements of both liberal and civic-republican ideas of citizenship exist within my theory of visual citizenship, the words “shift,” “transition,” and “change” operate as a much better characterization.

gain the personal satisfaction and certainty that we have actually performed a service and made a difference” (p. 8). The individualization of citizenship enables a changed relationship between supplier and consumer, establishing a different set of priorities, by establishing what counts as enactments of citizenship. For example, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush did not ask the American people to buy war bonds, to change their behavior, or become more politically involved. Instead, he urged the public to go and shop—the epitome of public as consumers (Crenson & Ginsberg, 2002). Thus, democracy and citizenship become refocused on individual actions and those actions as related back to the nation. The implications of a consumer based citizenship rather than community based citizenship extend far beyond mere consumption of goods. When the government begins to view individuals as consumers, the type of accountability differs than that of a community citizen. Community citizens constitute a public, a group with similar interests, which the government represents and, thus, help hold the government accountable. Consumers, on the other hand, may or may not be stakeholders. Additionally, regarding oneself as a consumer eliminates, or at least obscures, social and political action towards a larger purpose than oneself, as the goal is more often self-focused than group-focused.

A personalized democracy based upon each individual highlights the notion that citizenship is both everywhere and performed by individuals rather than existing as a static category (Asen, 2004; Cisneros, 2011). The spaces for engaging in citizenship can be anywhere; for as Schudson (1998) argued, “civic participation now takes place everywhere. It exists in the microprocesses of social life” (p. 298). I argue a key microprocess involves the corporeal body itself and extend Crenson and Ginsberg’s (2002) notion of consumption beyond goods and

services to the consumption of food as evident in the body itself. Under the consumption model, individual consumers should be responsible for their own bodies and discipline themselves to embody the look of a good citizen; this model of citizenship locates responsibility for change within the individual—within the way that they consume goods or services, or even in the foods that they eat. The consumer then enacts citizenship through individual consumption which is displayed through one's corporeal body.

Although one's individual consumption reflects on that specific individual, the body also functions as a sign of larger national civic health, and therefore, is open to public regulation. One's body is not simply one's one: No one's body exists in a vacuum. More specifically, an individual body does not merely impact an individual's self-concept, self-worth, and/or self-image. The ways in which publics read other individual's bodies influences both public perception of that individual body, which in turn can influence how one feels about their own body. In the context of fat bodies in particular, in late 2012, the Trust for America's Health (TAH) released a report entitled *F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America's Future*. TAH argued America exists "at a crossroads" (p. 3) and that the individual bodily health of people impacted the collective health of the nation. This report exists as just one of many lines of argument concerning America as a fat nation and the need to take action to regulate the private lives of American citizens (for example, see Salahi, 2012; Stoneman, 2010; Thomson, 2009). This line of reasoning demonstrated a blurring of the lines between private individuals and public collective(s), showcasing how both public interests and individual bodies intersect.

Some argue that "publicly defined signs of bodily failure" resulted in individualized actions rather than public ones (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 22) or that the locus of personal

responsibility functions as the “master frame in the current cultural discourse surrounding obesity” (Thomson, 2009, p. 3). Although I agree with Shari L. Dworkin, Faye Linda Wachs, and Deborah Morrision Thomson that the individual and personal actions matter in current rhetorics of fatness and obesity, I argue the individual does not function as the sole, or even primary, mode. Public signs of bodily failure operate within a public context. By shifting the locus of citizenship to the individual, the individual consumers gain a public rationale, and in some cases public support, for critically examining the health of one’s own and others’ bodies. The body becomes the test for who constitutes a good citizen, and more specifically, the result of seeming consumption choices, entailing consumptive bodily citizenship.

### **Consumptive Bodily Citizenship**

Focusing on the body and its appearance, “allows the body to become an object of consumption in addition to a site from which to consume” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 23). The dual nature of consumption, as both object and consumptive site, means that people can be judged by how their bodies manifest their consumption choices. This dissertation then extends two key works on citizenship relative to the rhetoric of bodily consumption: Jeffrey Bennett’s (2009) book on the tension between public health and individual civil rights in the ban on gay men’s blood donations and Phaedra Pezzullo’s (2011) research on boycotts and buycotts as political advocacy. First, in his analysis of the 1977 blood prohibition policy and subsequent discourse in the following three decades, Bennett (2009) argued the concept of public health established a relationship between individuals and the public, specifically reinforcing “mythic notions of the pure nation-state and the ‘biological responsibilities’ that accompany citizenship in that space” (p. 13). Although Bennett used the case study of HIV, his study demonstrated how a



perceived medical problem activates the dominant frame of medical responsibility and health. By extension, rhetorics of an epidemic of obesity fall under similar logics, activating a frame of a health crisis (see Saguy, 2013; also, Gard, 2011; Gard & Wright, 2005; Kwan, 2009; LeBesco, 2004; Murray, 2008). By placing obesity as a matter of public health, crisis and/or epidemic, it then necessitates civic responses, including “public health” campaigns. Second, Pezzullo’s (2011) analyzed consumptive based advocacy; through a focus on successful boycotts and buycotts, she argued their impact was not merely economical but included political ramifications as well. I view this dissertation as answering her call for scholars “to identify when acts of consumption and/or non-consumption enable more democratic relations-and when they do not” (p. 127).

I argue scholars should view the body as a critical site of consumption *and* citizenship. As Gard (2009) argued, food and its consumption functions constitutively, creating identity: “Food behavior can be seen as identity work; we relate to food in ways that say something about who we are and who we want to be” (p. 40). The food we eat and the maintenance of our bodies signals publicly our fitness in a dual sense: Fitness becomes negotiated through shape, tone, and physicality as well as appropriateness within public life (see also Kwan, 2009). Notions of Americas as a fat nation (Trust for America’s Health, 2012; see also, Farley & Cohen, 2001; Hellmich, 2002; Stoneman, 2010) drew on this consumptive bodily model of citizenship: Rather than a public problem demanding collective action, obesity became redefined to a problem of literal consumption beholden to individual consumers and individual action. The duty of consumptive citizenship entails appropriately consuming food, impacting all body types, fat as well as thin. One’s corporeal body signals to others whether one is deemed good or bad, drawing

upon rhetorically designated ideas of fatness as an individual, rather than social, problem (Kwan, 2009).

Some of the tension between liberal and civic-republican views of citizenship stemmed from the political process and the ways leaders motivate individuals to action. I argue dominant rhetorics of fatness and obesity take cues from both strands of citizenship: A collective problem exists for us as a nation or public but the solution is understood as individual. Rhetorics then construct fatness as a problem and then urge all of individuals to take action, either on their own as individuals to enact changes in their own fat bodies and/or to discipline (other) fat bodies. Bridging the liberal/civic-republican divide, these discourses' assumptions include: (1) agreement that individuals have liberties and rights, including what one can eat and one's weight; and (2) when individuals violate norms of thinness and/or health (as defined by specific individuals and/or the community at large), one has the right to attempt to publicly discipline them for the betterment of all individuals. The health of the republic then figuratively and literally becomes the health of individual citizens. Such reasoning helps to answer Smith's (1997) call for theories of citizenship to focus on "how and why do people come to construct civic identities" (p. 30). His work foregrounded the necessity to look at how we as a nation construct our identities through civic myths, which explain "who is eligible for membership, who is not and why, and what the community's values and aims are" (p. 33). In the case of rhetorics of fatness and obesity, the community's aim is for health of individuals to ensure health of the nation; those eligible for membership include those deemed physically fit, whereas those deemed physically unfit would not be eligible. The fat body exists then not simply a statement about that

particular individual's identity (although it is that); rather it is also about a public, civic identity as well. Individual bodies become something larger, as part of a social group.

The individualizing of citizenship intersects with notions of the fit citizen, those who are rhetorically constructed as physically fit and thus politically relevant (see Elliott, 2007). By moving from a concept of public goods to public consumption, such rhetorics direct us on how to read oneself as part of a public and who counts as an appropriate enactment of consumptive bodily citizenship. Citizenship as consumptive display not only articulates what types of physical bodies we should take—thin rather than fat ones to gain political mobility/ascendency—but also identifies which type of action we should take: individual consumption rather than public action.

Part of the reason for appropriate citizenship being rooted in the corporeal form of an individual fit body is the changing of citizenship from a larger public to an individual consumer. This individualizing of citizenship enables a tighter constriction of the physical features of the appropriate body type for citizens as display. Appropriate consumption is defined by the visualizations of the body, including both description and images. With the dominant framings of obesity existing as an epidemic and fatness as undesirable, fat bodies exist as potential or actual problems. Fatness rhetorically signifies a problem in the following two ways—linked to a lack of control and a visual marker and evidence of backwardness. First, fatness demonstrates a lack of control, whereby social norms indicates that individuals should be able to maintain an appropriate amount of weight (see Braziel & LeBesco, 2001; also, Kwan, 2009; Murray, 2008; Saguy & Gruys, 2010; Thomson, 2009). In this way, these fat bodies fail to become appropriately formed or maintained docile bodies, in a Foucaultian sense. As Michel Foucault (1977) argued in *Discipline and Punish*, bodies are produced through power which exists as a strategy or

“network of relations” (p. 26). Indeed, in the prison, the panoptic gaze and the ever present visibility of the prisoner produces a particular kind of subject—the docile body. Through visibility, regulation, and control, prisoners are produced, and internally regulate themselves. With the case of weight and body size, the tyranny of slenderness and the accompanying beauty norms (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003) help discipline individuals. Material bodies exist within the panoptic public gaze and operate as disciplined towards thinness and against fatness. Thus, exercise, diet and the “organized diet program [are] . . . particularly extreme version[s] of panoptic culture” (Heyes, 2006, p. 134). Disciplining through external motivation leads to internal regulation; the need for such disciplining exists because of the presumption individuals cannot control their desires and behaviors, and thus those individuals are morally weak (Gard & Wright, 2005). Thus, those who stand as visibly fat challenge the notion of control, standing outside socially accepted norms of civility (Farrell, 2011), and thus become marked as an inferior public identity.

Second, the fat body stands as backward, a sense of downward mobility, and/or evidence of failure to appropriate societal norms. To get ahead socially and politically, individuals typically need to demonstrate a sense of physical fitness. Within the U.S. capitalist neoliberal order, fatness stands against productivity and thus against social order. Kathleen LeBesco (2004) articulated the link between economic ideology, fatness, and mobility: “If fat people are understood as antithetical to the efficiency and productivity required to succeed in our capitalistic economy, then their presence haunts as the specter of downward mobility” (p. 56). Thus, one’s fatness not only is a personal letting go of one’s body, but it also indicates a negative ability to be able to move up in economic circles; the argument presents itself that since someone cannot

control their own corporeal form through their body, then s/he will also not be able to control one's spending, and will be stuck in the status quo, not advancing—or possibly moving downward on the social/economic order. To gain political ascendancy, individuals typically need to slim down and tone up, demonstrating their ability to handle public life (see Farrell, 2011; also, Groer, 2011). Politicians and celebrities garner more media attention and scrutiny than most people; with the increasingly visual culture of the U.S., it becomes more important to look the part, which includes being thin and fit, even if it means yo-yo dieting and other extreme behavior. For example, Tyra Banks and Oprah Winfrey, are portrayed more successful when seen as slimmer and more fit, and any weight gain is seen as a fall or setback (see Joseph, 2009 and Farrell, 2011 respectively). Successful bodies then are presented as thin, toned, and trained; body thinness serves as “ ‘cultural capital’-a non-material resource that conveys socio-cultural status” (Gerber & Quinn, 2008, p. 2). If someone wants to advance and move up the social ladder, demonstrating a continuation of good body form or a reassertion of control through weight loss becomes an important task.

With the visual display of public identity, the fat body rhetorically represents what is commonly deemed a wrong version of consumption and, therefore, an inappropriate individual, social advocate, and/or mother. In this framework, the fat body stands as the site of overconsumption and greed, which intertwines with the previous two themes, rhetorics of being out of control or unruly and a sense of downward mobility. Although the U.S. neoliberal economy relies on consumption of goods and services, certain types of consumption are valued over others. The fat body displays a visual sense of overconsumption of resources in one's physical form. Even if the person is lower to middle class, rhetorics surrounding their

consumption again connote appropriate behavior. Take recent examples of whether food stamps should be allowed to purchase fast food or proposed food taxes on soft drinks and/or candy (Salahi, 2012). These debates center on the idea of what constitutes proper consumption, and the advocates attempt to regulate and control appropriate consumption of goods and foods and, thus, the corporeal body. For those who stand outside the boundaries of thinness, their bodies fail to appropriately consume food and fail as public consumers. Such dominant frames of individual responsibility diverts attention from structural issues, including economic, cultural, and political reasons (Farrell, 2011; Gerber & Quinn, 2008; Riley, Frith, Wiggins, Markula, & Burns, 2008).

Indeed, with fat stigma becoming so normalized and socially accepted (Farrell, 2011), much of the discourses are truncated and abbreviated, as they link into the large chain of fatness narratives. In this way, rhetorics of bodily citizenship intersect with the rhetorics of display which Prelli (2006) argued both conceal and reveal. Lauren Berlant (1997) summarized the connection between bodily citizenship and absence:

Whenever citizenship comes to look like a question of the *body*, a number of processes are being hidden. The body's seeming obviousness distracts attention from the way it organizes meaning, and diverts the critical gaze from publicity's role in the formation of taxonomies that construct bodies publicly. (p. 36)

Thus, with the case of the fat body, fat stigma hides the rhetorical work as narratives about fatness become normalized within U.S. culture.

The fat body operates as a form of the social body, whereby social norms and mores are enacted on the body itself. Therefore, the social body functions to visualize political identity, and rhetoric depicts which bodies and which discourses are deemed appropriate. Michael Warner

(2002) powerfully argued that visibility of bodies relates to acceptability: “This subjective anxiety over the public display of the body . . . has a direct equivalent in liberal notions of what is appropriate for public discussion and political action” (p. 42). Additionally, physical attributes of bodies have social consequence: “The human body is always treated as an image of society and . . . there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension” (Douglas, 1996, p. 74). Thus, not all bodies are represented as socially desirable, and indeed, the culture of fat stigma denigrates the fat body and represents it as unfit, undesirable, and uncivilized. Farrell (2011) argued fat and fatness do not exist as neutral categories or descriptors, but instead functions as the “central protagonist in the cultural development of what constituted a proper American body” (p. 5). She traces how since the late nineteenth century, fatness “began to be seen as a *cultural problem*, worthy of public comment and concern” (p. 40), one which continues now in the twenty-first century.

### **Intersection of Motherhood and Citizenship**

I now turn to an embodied role, that of motherhood. As many contemporary U.S. rhetorics of fatness and obesity focus on children’s obesity and the role of parental caregiver in “allowing” such practices, understanding the practices and the cultural constraints of mothering matters. Ideas of the public figure of woman draw upon cultural ideologies of motherhood. Motherhood does not exist as a set of biological or innate characteristics, but upon cultural assumptions (Kinser, 2010; see also, Glenn, 1994, p. 3; Longhurst, 2008, p. 4; O’Reilly, 2004, p. 5). For example, understandings of what makes one a good or bad mother draw upon social and cultural norms; the act of mothering does not only exist within a relationship between mother and children but also in the public eye, becoming an “ideal to believe in, and one that people

both expect and internalize” (Green, 2004, p. 33). Motherhood exists as aspirational: “Women who mother in the institution of motherhood are regarded as ‘good’ mothers, while women who mother outside or against the institution of motherhood are viewed as ‘bad’ mothers (O’Reilly, 2004, p. 2). Also, regardless of one’s motherhood status, all women are judged against both the ideal of institution as well as “how well *all* mothers are doing their job” (Buchanan, 1996, p. 5). Indeed, culturally mothers are expected to improve society “by producing their citizen-children civic virtue” (Buchanan, 1996, p. 21). In this way, a good female citizen becomes judged against the cultural institution of motherhood.

Culturally speaking, good mothers according to the hegemonic construction of motherhood are women who are “white, middle-class, married, stay-at-home moms” (O’Reilly, 2010, p. 370). Additionally, good mothers do not create a “moral panic” but instead promote values such as “stability, order, . . . [and are] loving, nurturing, self-sacrificing, morally pure” (Longhurst, 2008, p. 129). Contrastingly, bad mothers fall outside of such parameters, representing a lack or problem, such as single-moms, lesbian moms, poor moms (for more on the lens of lack on motherhood, see Longhurst, 2008). In many ways, lacking and blaming go hand-in-hand (Ladd-Taylor & Umansky, 1998), enabling ways to scapegoat mothers for problems of their children. Being labelled a bad mother constitutes a failing of societal values: Some “hold ‘bad’ mothers responsible for many of society’s gravest problems because they see them lacking not only individual values, but also what traditional beliefs identify as women’s ‘natural’ maternal capacity for childrearing” (Buchanan, 1996, p. 9). Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky (1998) identified three main types of bad mothers in the United States: those outside the nuclear family; those failing to protect children from harm; and “those whose children went



wrong” (p. 3). The cases studies in this dissertation focused on the last two types of bad mothers; as fat children, the dominant fatness rhetorics argue those children are wrong as well as harmed by lack of appropriate mothering. With citizenship as individualized, the role of the cultural mother becomes even more important. The good citizen requires a good body, and good mothers help mold children’s bodies into good bodies. A mother failing to do so means a cultural failure of the institution of motherhood.

These ideas of good and bad mothers and current understandings of women as public figures draws on ideas of motherhood, continuing from 19th century American ideals of Republican motherhood, the cult of domesticity, and true womanhood. The idea of Republican motherhood established that when women raised children well, society would be better. More explicitly, being a mother was a civic duty:

[The republican mother’s] patriotic duty to educate her sons to be moral and virtuous citizens linked her to the state and gave her some degree of power over its future. The responsibility of raising republican citizens offered women a political role which went well beyond common-law assumptions subsuming women’s legal identities into those of husbands or fathers. Now women had a civic role and identity distinct from men. (Evans, 1989, p. 57)

Women as mothers would then train children to be appropriate public citizens, linking together the ideas of motherhood and good citizen. Additionally, such this ideal meant that women should be a particular kind of mother, leading to a universal mother and “making it the duty of all mothers to look after all children—not just their own” (Clapp, 1998, p. 4). These ideals of Republican motherhood also emphasized women’s proper role, with the cult of domesticity and

ideal of True Woman. Being a True Woman centered on creating a home and thus place for children: “Made by God to put duty to husband and children-to family-at the center of her life, the True Woman achieved her proper moral status and authority in her roles as wife and mother” (Buchanan, 1996, p. 38). As women were seen as more gentle, they were thought to be better to raise appropriate children and for the future of the nation (Evans, 1998).

However, these ideals of motherhood, from the 19th century to today, emphasize a particular type of woman: White, heterosexual, middle-to-upper class woman, excluding women of color. Writing at length, Patricia Hill Collins (1991b) argued the cult of domesticity and true womanhood does not apply to Black women.<sup>7</sup> She wrote:

First, the assumption that mothering occurs within the confines of a private, nuclear family household where the mother has almost total responsibility for child-rearing is less applicable to Black families. While the ideal of the cult of true womanhood has been held up to Black women for emulation, racial oppression has denied Black families sufficient resources to support private, nuclear family households. Second, strict sex-role segregation, with separate male and female spheres of influence within the family, has been less commonly found in African-American families than in White middle-class ones. Finally, the assumption that motherhood and economic dependency on men are linked and that to be a “good” mother one must stay at home, making motherhood a full-time “occupation,” is similarly uncharacteristic of African-American families. (pp. 43-44)

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<sup>7</sup> This dissertation uses Black and White with capital letters when referring to race or racial identities. Lower case white and black refer to colors of items, such as photographs or clothing. The only exception to this differentiation in the use of direct quotations; I have kept the capitalization (upper or lower case) as reflected by the author(s).

Although the standard and ideals of womanhood and motherhood are aspirational for all women, such ideals ignore the different histories and experiences of Black women, as well as anyone falling outside the ideals of good mother.

The figure of the cultural mother then existed as a key way for women to be political in the 19th century and such ideas carried on to the present. Although based upon White, heterosexual, middle-to-upper class women's experiences, the ideals of motherhood create public understandings of what constitutes a good or bad mother, whereby women are responsible for raising good children for the sake of the nation. As I argued previously in Chapter one, the body displays one's citizenship status. As 19th century mothers were responsible for their children's future and the future of the nation, so too are cultural mothers now. Rhetorics of fatness and obesity offer an important way to understanding how citizenship and motherhood become intertwined.

### **Conclusions**

These rhetorics demonstrate the rights and responsibilities of consumptive citizenship stem from the form of individual bodies. Each of the case studies in this dissertation, First Lady Michelle Obama, the state of Georgia anti-childhood obesity campaign, and Marilyn Wann and the I Stand campaign, all center the body as the primary mode of assessing citizenship. Drawing on notions of individual responsibility, these rhetorics argue we can all make personal changes. The body serves as the site to judge one's appropriateness for public life, advocacy, and citizenship. Although we are judged on our bodies, not all bodies are equal: Race, gender, and weight all implicate whether or not our bodies are read as *appropriate* consumptions. The fat body rhetorically represents a wrong version of (over)consumption and therefore an

inappropriate citizen, social advocate, and/or mother. Although the U.S. neoliberal economy relies on consumption of goods and services, certain types of consumption are valued over others. The fat body displays a visual sense of overconsumption in one's corporeal self. Ultimately, consumptive bodily citizenship not only articulates what types of physical bodies we should take, but also identifies which type of advocacy we should take—with control over one's individual body, the goal becomes individual consumption rather than collective public action within logics of race, gender, and weight.

## CHAPTER THREE:

MICHELLE OBAMA'S BODILY ADVOCACY<sup>8</sup>

All First Ladies exist within the public eye, and First Lady Michelle Obama is no exception. She appeared on *Ellen* doing push-ups, inspired new fashion trends (the sleeveless look), and appeared on the covers of several major magazines, including as one of two other women to share a cover with Oprah Winfrey on *O, The Oprah Magazine* (Oprah, 2009b). As part of her role as First Lady, she spearheaded a social and political campaign beginning in February 2010 to address childhood obesity entitled *Let's Move!*. This campaign aims to end childhood obesity within a generation. Since 2010, Obama continues to promote the campaign through speaking engagements, online social media, and guest appearances at schools, community centers, and television shows. Additionally, she advocates for the campaign through her actions as an individual and a mother. However, Obama not only stands as a representative and spokesperson for the *Let's Move!* campaign: Her personal life, corporeal body, and the discourse surrounding her body function as ways to read the success or failure of the campaign, and correspondingly, herself as a social advocate.

This chapter brings together notions of the body as argument (DeLuca, 1999), controlling images of Black women (Collins, 1991a), and rhetorics of fatness and obesity (Farrell, 2011; LeBesco, 2004; LeBesco & Braziel, 2001) to argue Obama as a public

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<sup>8</sup> This chapter developed through feedback from not only my advisor and committee but also through conference presentations. The first draft of the paper I presented at the 36th Annual Meeting of Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, & Gender conference in Tacoma, WA. Focusing on the argumentation strategies, I presented a portion this chapter at the 2013 NCA/AFA Summer Conference on Argumentation in Alta, UT. An essay stemming from that presentation was published as part of the selected works of the conference in Catherine H. Palczewski's (2014) *Disturbing argument: Selected works from the 18th National Communication Association/ American Forensics Association Alta conference on argumentation*.

advocate represents not only the health of herself but also the ideological health of the nation, seen through lenses of gender, race, and physical fitness. Additionally, First Lady Obama's advocacy stemmed from her role as "Mom-in-Chief," positioning Black motherhood in the national spotlight. Bringing together these seemingly disconnected lines of inquiry (the body, visual images, motherhood, and fatness) enable scholars to see how images of race, body, motherhood, and weight are connected, intertwined, and construct each other in the context of advocacy. This chapter begins with the historical context of the *Let's Move!* campaign and the role of the First Lady. The chapter then analyzes the competing discourses about Michelle Obama's body, focusing on what the discourse argues about body, motherhood, and advocacy. Ultimately, this case study demonstrates how bodily citizenship depends upon gendered, raced, and classed norms: The good mother and the good citizen must also exhibit good bodies, within the constraints of White gendered classed ideals.

### ***Let's Move! Campaign***

Part of the reasoning for Obama's focus on children's health centered on the increasing attention, public anxiety, public concern, and public advocacy in the United States relative to the size of bodies, and children's bodies in particular. The Centers for Disease Control (2013a) reported the rates of obesity have increased in the last thirty years, with the rates for children more than doubling and the rates for teens more than tripling (para. 1). The CDC also acknowledged (2013b) these rates decreased from 2003-2010, consistent with Gard's (2011) argument that, from a statistical standpoint, the obesity epidemic is over, as outlined in Chapter one. Even though the rates of obesity

have statistically decreased, the rhetorical labeling of the situation as an obesity crisis or epidemic urges immediate action.

To address what is deemed a dire health issue, First Lady Obama began her public health campaign entitled *Let's Move!* The campaign demonstrated significant attention by the federal government to the bodies and health of its citizens, with a short time span to create change as outlined by its mission statement. *Let's Move!* stated its mission as “dedicated to solving the challenge of childhood obesity within a generation, so that children born today will grow up healthier and able to pursue their dreams” (n.d., para. 9). To accomplish this goal, the campaign offers information and/or motivation through their online website (<http://www.letsmove.gov>), blog (<http://www.letsmove.gov/blog>); Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/letsmove>); Twitter (<https://twitter.com/letsmove>); YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/letsmove>); and Flickr photostream of images (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/50399324@N07/>). The varied social media all work to promote the overall campaign's mission by providing facts, resources, motivational tips, videos, and photos towards the collective goal.

Additionally, in May 2010 a White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity presented a report to the President advocating steps to solve the problem of childhood obesity within one generation. The report argued in support of Obama's *Let's Move!* campaign, highlighting the goals of encouraging physical fitness, diet, and nutrition as part of a positive program to solve the obesity crisis and produce a healthier generation of American children (2010, p. 1). Since its beginning, the campaign grew to include *Let's Move! in Indian Country* (<http://lmic.ihs.gov>) and *Let's Move! Active Schools* (<http://>

[www.letsmoveschools.org](http://www.letsmoveschools.org)). On a legislative level, President Barack Obama signed Public Law 111-296, the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, with the dual goals of ending child hunger and obesity by increasing accessing and quality of food. Thus, *Let's Move!* demonstrated a significant social presence, and Michelle Obama's role in the program deserves critical attention.

### **The Rhetorical Situation of The First Lady and Public Womanhood**

One of the unique challenges Michelle Obama faces as *Let's Move!* spokesperson involves her role as First Lady of the United States (FLOTUS). As First Ladies are not elected in an official capacity, she cannot appear too involved in the everyday running of the office of the President and, yet, can offer an important role in furthering the presidential agenda. Throughout history, First Ladies served as escorts or hostesses as well as a "supportive partner" to the President (Quinlan, Bates, & Webb, 2012, p. 119). Indeed, particularly with the expansion of various forms of media, the presidential couple becomes more important and the private life of one's marriage has become part of public discussion with "the intense mingling of the public and private . . . His career is their career" (Marton, 2002, p. 6). Additionally, although the role of First Ladies changed over time, what all First Ladies have in common is that "individual First Ladies have reflected the status of American women of their time while helping shape expectations of what women can properly do" (Caroli, 2010, p. xxi). Thus, analyzing the role and rhetorics surrounding the FLOTUS become particularly instructive for seeing the expectations of public womanhood and motherhood in the United States.



As outlined in Chapter two, women are judged by the cultural institutions of both womanhood and motherhood, and such understandings are based upon White norms, stemming from understandings of 19th century notions of domesticity and Republican motherhood (see Buchanan, 1996; Clapp, 1998; Collins, 1991a & b; Evans, 1989; O'Reilly, 2010). Not only are Black women compared to the idealized White womanhood and White motherhood, the ways in which these ideals are constructed makes it nearly impossible for Black women to meet these standards. The cult of true womanhood defined work “in opposition to and incompatible with motherhood”; however, this standard exists based upon White standards (Collins, 1991b, p. 48). For Black women, work was and remained important to understandings of womanhood and motherhood (Collins, 1991b, p. 48). Explaining further, Melissa V. Harris-Perry (2011) argued, “the Victorian ideal of true womanhood required strict adherence to a code of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity . . . African American women’s lives and labors in the antebellum South contrasted sharply with this iconic womanhood” (p. 55). Understandings of appropriate womanhood, which Harris-Perry extended to citizenship, depend upon racialized and oppositional construct: White woman are pure, pious, and submissive whereas Black women are hypersexualized and domineering.

Part of the reason Black women fail such standards centers on the controlling images of Black women (Collins, 1991). According to Patricia Hill Collins (1991), the four controlling images of Black women include the mammy, the Black matriarch, the welfare mother, and the Jezebel (pp. 70-78). The first three images all center around motherhood. While the Black matriarch and the welfare mother fail at mothering their

children appropriately, either because they demasculinize men as fathers or fail to do enough for their children, the mammy functions as a good mother figure to White children of those she care for, but she cannot be a good mother in her own right.

Additionally, sexuality intersects with all four images. The appropriate Black cultural mother, the mammy, is asexual and thus deemed a good woman and mother figure. The other three images contain hypersexuality and thus the women exist as bad or loose women: The Black matriarch is hypersexualized and aggressively against men; the welfare queen is too sexual, evidenced by her too many children; the Jezebel is by definition a sexually aggressive women of low morals (p. 78).

Drawing on these images, Harris-Perry (2011) analyzed the controlling images based around characteristics and identified three main forms of stereotypes: “sexual promiscuity, emasculating brashness, and Mammy-like devotion to white domestic concerns” (p. 49). In many ways, Harris-Perry’s analysis mirrored Collins’, focusing how the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality constrain Black women. One significant addition to controlling images of Black women includes the Sapphire figure or angry Black woman image. The angry Black woman is “shrill, loud, argumentative, irrationally angry, and verbally abusive” (p. 87) and although “Sapphire is one name for the myth, the angry black woman has many different shadings and representations: the bad black woman, the black ‘bitch,’ and the emasculating matriarch” (p. 88). The angry Black woman exists as a woman who is always complaining angrily and irrationally in public, which functions as a reason to deny her right to speak. The focus on rationality and lack or control of emotions stems from a Western, White male rhetorical tradition,

demonstrating how understandings of public speech, and thus, public citizen become constrained within specific gendered, racialized, and class based notions.

Based upon these controlling images and their modifications, for Black women to be successful at mothering, they have to walk a fine line: not be mothers themselves, not be sexual, and not have children but instead be an appropriate stand-in and role model for others' children. As hypersexuality ties Black women to animalistic ideas, it dehumanizes and delegitimizes Black women as speaking subjects. Instead, they are animals or objects which become acted upon. To be read as an appropriate speaking subject, as an appropriate public identity of woman, Black women cannot be angry or speak against men (as that could be read as emasculating men). The types of speaking roles remain more limited, but in general, drawing on self-sacrifice and communal values offers a way to be an appropriate Black woman and Black citizen.

Against these backdrops of the expectations of First Ladies and cultural understandings of public womanhood, the institution of motherhood, and Black women as mothers stands Michelle Obama. Obama negotiates not only her role as First Lady but also as a Black woman, particularly as she serves as the United States's first Black First Lady. From the beginning of the 2008 presidential campaign, Michelle Obama faced criticism. For example, in the first presidential campaign, the media branded her an angry Black woman, encapsulated in the July 21, 2008 cover of *The New Yorker*. The cover showcased a cartoon of Michelle and Barack Obama in the White House; Michelle appeared wearing combat boots and an Afro, toting an assault rifle, fist bumping Barack on their political victory while Barack appeared wearing Middle Eastern attire next to a

picture of Osama bin Laden. This cover showcased the fear of a strong Black woman as well as a Black man in power; the cartoon reflected a cultural assumption that the Obama's racial affiliations would threaten traditional White America.

Visuals of Michelle Obama drew on a long line of visual depictions of Black women in particular. Tracing the iconic images of Black women, particularly since the 1970s, Lakesia D. Johnson (2012) argued, "in the eyes of much of the public in the United States, a Black female revolutionary can be summed up in one image: A Black woman with a big Afro, a gun, and an attitude to match. She is considered a threat to our nation and a threat to political power" (p. 107). Johnson noted the Afro in particular became coded within a tradition that linked Michelle Obama to revolutionary Black women in the 1970s, particularly Angela Davis; creating an association with the Afro linked Obama to Black power and "a signifier for an untamed political identity" (p. 113). Cooper (2010) also analyzed *The New Yorker* cover and argued the visual depiction of Michelle Obama's body reinforced "the fear of the unregulated black female body as a supreme danger to the American body politic" (p. 49). Thus, Obama faces an additional challenge as First Lady: She must negotiate her femininity as well as Blackness. As the first Black First Lady, she must attend to the sexist and racist attitudes as well as the specific controlling images of Black women in her role as First Lady.

Obama negotiates her role as First Lady by fitting within the historical traditions of the First Lady, focusing on items of social justice for the nation. Rather than being a revolutionary, which is coded as anti-American, she can channel her efforts towards social change. Johnson (2012) succinctly summarized this position, arguing that

FLOTUS Obama “replaced the image of the mythological dangerous and angry black woman with a portrait of an American whose legitimate and righteous anger about injustice was appropriate given the current state of the country” (p. 7). To counter images or fears of being an angry Black woman, an emasculating Black matriarch, and fears of a First Lady being overly political, Obama draws on her role as a mother to her two daughters as well as cultural mother of the nation. As Sheri Parks (2010) argued concerning images of strong Black women in public life, Black women are “allowed to be strong, but only for the good of others” (p. xviii). Drawing on her role as First Lady, Obama represents herself as putting her children and the children of the nation first; her concern is not on herself but for others.

### **Mom-in-Chief (of the Nation)**

During the 2008 presidential campaign, Michelle Obama referred to her role as FLOTUS to continue to primarily be Mom-in-Charge or Mom-in-Chief of the Obama’s two daughters, Sasha and Malia (“Michelle Obama describes duty,” 2008; also, Adeosun, 2012, p. 10). Many media stories picked up this framing, including a book entitled *Michelle Obama: Mom-in-chief* (Edwards & Call, 2009) and newspaper articles such as “Michelle Obama: from lightning rod to mom-in-chief,” “Michelle Obama: Beyond mom-in-chief,” “Michelle Obama: the triumph of the ‘mom-in-chief,’ ” “Mom-in-chief Michelle Obama graces ‘Parenting’ magazine,” and “Michelle Obama: What does she mean by ‘mom-in-chief’?” (Belkin, 2012; Carmon, 2012; Puente, 2012; Sherwell, 2012; Tulumello, 2012). Using this framing of Mom-in-Charge or Mom-in-Chief deflected criticisms of Obama as an angry Black woman as well as overstepping her (potential)

bounds as FLOTUS (see Johnson, 2012 for more). Writing specifically about Michelle Obama and her early work during President Barack Obama's first term, Harris-Perry (2009) argued FLOTUS Obama's rhetoric of Mom-in-Chief responded to negative images of Black women:

As mom-in-chief Michelle Obama also subverts a deep, powerful, and old public discourse on black women as bad mothers. Enslaved black women had no control over their own children. Their sons and daughters could be sold away from them without their consent, or brutally disciplined without their protection. So when a black woman claims public ownership of her children she helps rewrite that ugly history. (para. 10)

Drawing on her role as mother enabled Obama to not only advocate for her own children but functioned as an appropriate place of strength for being Mom-in-Chief of the Nation. With the *Let's Move!* campaign, Obama combined two meanings of Mom-in-Chief, being a mother to her own daughters as well as mother to the nation's children. Focusing on mothering and positioning the cultural role of Mom-in-Chief provided space for her to speak as an advocate, as she did not focus on herself but argued selflessly for all of "our" children.

From the very beginning of the *Let's Move!* campaign, Obama articulated the need to focus on the children of the American nation, including her own, as a major reasoning for developing the campaign. The White House hosted a question and answer session with *Newsweek* to celebrate FLOTUS Obama's March 13, 2010 cover and the launch of the *Let's Move!* campaign. Asked why she started the campaign, the First Lady stated the

campaign had a very personal connection. Obama explained she began thinking about healthy eating and the need for the campaign while still living in Chicago (Barnett, 2012; Obama, 2010b). After taking her daughters, Sasha and Malia, to their childhood pediatrician, Obama was told that her girls were not as physically fit they could be. Obama reflected on her shock and the personal nature of the campaign, stating:

Now, personally, this issue for me is a personal one. . . . I bought [food] for convenience and cost. . . . my pediatrician saw some changes in my children's diet that caused him to say, "Hold on." And I think I was like most mothers—I thought I was doing absolutely everything that I was supposed to be doing. (2010b, para. 11)

Here, the First Lady admitted she did not know she was not sufficiently taking care of her daughters, while also identifying with the audience. Stating that she was like most mothers, she established common ground by putting herself on equal footing with the audience. Rather than being preachy, her tone demonstrated the fallibility of herself and others, and the need for education and knowledge. Therefore, in telling her story, Obama emphasized that *anyone* could be at risk, regardless of education levels, as an individual such as herself missed the signs.

Continuing the theme of anyone being at risk, Obama highlighted class issues explicitly during an interview for the 2012 Mother's Day issue with prominent Black magazine *Ebony*. Reflecting back on her earlier mothering moments with Sasha and Malia, she stated:

As I started looking at my own life, I realized, “Man, this has gotten away from me, and I didn’t even know it.” So what about the parents who don’t have resources, who aren’t going to the pediatrician and who don’t have the information? (Barnett, 2012, para. 20)

Again, Obama identified with the audience, through the use of her personal example and the rhetorical question. By looking at how even with her socio-economic privileges of an Ivy League degree, access to information, and likely better quality food, Obama attempted to deal with her own privileges. The rhetorical question implied that all parents could potentially be in the same position, given how easy it was for Obama to fall into bad habits and behaviors. For those without socio-economic privileges of information, pediatrician, and money to access information, health care, and other resources, Obama’s rhetorical question presumed that it would be even more difficult.

To resolve this situation, the First Lady emphasized the need to get help and guidance. Again, her personal experiences served as a catalyst for changes in her family and the need to address changes nationwide. Obama extended her mothering of her two children to the children of the nation, arguing all kids deserve a healthy life:

So it all came from my kitchen, my experience, my kids, which is why this is such a passion for me, because I know I struggled with it. And I know that I got some guidance and put my kids on a better track, and I think that all of our kids deserve to be on that track. (Barnett, 2012, para. 25)

Here the discourse of being on “a better track” demonstrated a problem that the discourse of “guidance” can resolve. However, Obama doesn’t position her policy appeal here



based upon role as FLOTUS or as a concerned citizen, but instead she argued from a place of motherhood. Drawing on the images of home and mothering, including her kitchen, experiences, and kids, demonstrated her care and concern for her children and all U.S. children. This rhetoric extended her Mom-in-Chief role of her own daughters to Mom-in-Chief of the Nation. Although Black motherhood conveys a sense of power (see Collins, 1991, p. 132), drawing on her personal experiences as a mom and using that as a model for the nation helped to subvert fears of a strong Black woman and/or a bad Black mother.

Obama complemented her focus on her role as a mom by looking at the health of “our kids” as a catalyst for change. About a month after the launch of the campaign, Obama promoted *Let's Move!* by appearing on the cover and writing a cover story for *Newsweek* entitled “Michelle on a Mission: How we can empower parents, schools, and the community to battle childhood obesity.” In her piece, she outlined the need to take action based upon health statistics and the hectic modern life which prevents a focus on more healthy modern life style. She wrote: “It’s now clear that between the pressure of today’s economy and the breakneck pace of modern life, the well-being of our kids has too often gotten lost in the shuffle” (2010a, para. 4). Her emphasis here on “our kids” demonstrated her caring for the nation’s children and their future, again activating her cultural mother status as Mom-in-Chief of the Nation. The language of “our kids” identified the problem as one facing all of the U.S., rather than within a particular population, demographic, or region. Additionally, rather than looking at individual parents as a problem, she argued the problem was “modern life,” which functioned to

absolve individual parents from blame, shifting the burden away from individuals and onto an amorphous entity, modernity, creating weak or soft bodies (for more on role of modernity and its relationship with fatness, see Gard & Wright, 2005, p. 28; also Seiler, 2012).

After outlining the statistics and explaining the problem facing all children, she then addressed the attitudes which created the problem-adults' choices and in particular, parental choices. Writing at some length, she stated:

And let's be honest with ourselves: Our kids didn't do this to themselves. Our kids don't decide what's served in the school cafeteria or whether there's time for gym class or recess. Our kids don't choose to make food products with tons of sugar and sodium in supersize portions . . . And no matter how much they beg for fast food and candy, our kids shouldn't be the ones calling the shots at dinnertime. We're in charge. We make these decisions. (2010a, para. 5)

Here the various choices provided examples of the modern lifestyle, including convenience, that she mentioned one paragraph earlier. Convenience could then include school cafeterias buying in bulk to save money and using frozen products for ease of preparation and cost. Another convenience example included foods high in high fructose corn syrup and salt which are generally cheaper, easier to make, and mass produce than fresh fruits and vegetables, due to the way the U.S. economy is structured. Thus, rather than blaming children, Obama argued adults were the problem, including adult decision makers, such as those from the top levels of decision making, schools and food manufacturers, as well as those on a more interpersonal level, parents. *Let's Move!* and

the First Lady focused on changing attitudes as well as behaviors so that all of “our” kids can be healthy and accomplish their dreams. The language of “our kids” constituted a national problem and she offered simplistic solutions of parenting by making better decisions and changes in policy decision makers. Focusing on children operated as an appropriate role for her as First Lady as well as advocate: It operated within consistent gender norms concerning motherhood and drew on appropriate female strength in terms of Black womanhood and leadership. However, it also simplified all the structural concerns, modernity, and convenience onto parents, ignoring the complexities of the situation.

### **Toned Arms *and* a Big Butt?**

In addition to her role as mother, Obama’s own corporeal body served as an example of how to make changes. Extending Brittney Cooper’s (2010) work which argued the public discourse surrounding Michelle Obama provided insights to race, gender, and national identity of Black women, I argue that such discourse articulates understandings of appropriate civic duty manifested through the body. Additionally, my work extends previous scholarship by Margaret M. Quinlan, Benjamin R. Bates, and Jennifer B. Webb (2012) who argued Obama and her body are judged by different standards than former First Ladies due to her race. They urge a critical interrogation of discourse surrounding her body because “when even the body of the First Lady . . . becomes the primary site on which to judge here, scrutinizing commentary of her body becomes essential” (p. 124). My study extends these scholarly works by contextualizing discourse about Obama’s body in relationship to both race and her advocacy relative to

the *Let's Move!* campaign. Her body, and the discourse surrounding her body, functioned as ways to read the success or failure of the campaign and, correspondingly, herself as a social advocate.

Rhetoric surrounding Obama and her *Let's Move!* campaign fit within two competing yet amplifying images and discourses, “toned arms” and “big butt.” Both discourses drew upon themes of fatness and Black image representations to use Obama’s body as evidence, either in support or criticism of the program. One discourse cast her primarily as a subject: She exhibits toned arms as an example of physical fitness. The other discourse cast her primarily as an object: Her big butt demonstrates her out of control self, gluttony, and hypocrisy. Although the discourses arrived at different conclusions, they both began with the same premise: Obama’s body served as the site of judgment for appropriateness for public life, advocacy, and civic duty.

Advocacy functioned as constituted and enacted through intersections of race, gender, and weight, as both the toned arms and big butt discourses presumed the thin body serves as the ideal, fit bodily advocate: Good citizen advocates inhabit good bodies. However, Obama disturbed neat conceptualizations of either a subject or an object while at the same time solidifying advocacy via the good, thin body, highlighting complexities of agency, subjectivity, and civic duty within one corporeal body.

### **Toned Arms Rhetorics**

The toned arms rhetoric drew on Obama’s physicality and strength, using her body as evidence of success, arguing we can all make changes to our bodies because she managed to find the time to exercise and be physically fit. Both Obama and others used such rhetoric to promote

the campaign. Focusing on Obama's toned arms extended the lineage of visual images of Black female strength via the physicality of the body. Additionally, this narrative enabled her to respond to controlling images of Black women by using her body for arguments concerning individual responsibility and fitness. Her body was not hypersexualized, but toned and fit. The overall rationale behind personal fitness was to be a better contributor to the overall society, by being healthy.

Describing her commitments to personal fitness, Obama frequently outlined her personal fitness routine. Activities included daily running, lifting weights, the elliptical or treadmill, push-ups, sit-ups and sometimes boxing, kick-boxing, or yoga (Knox, 2013, para. 8). Typically, the workouts lasted 90 minutes (Heil, 2014, para. 2; Toomey, 2014, para. 6), starting at 4:30 or 5 am ("Michelle Obama workout routine," 2012, para. 2; Oprah, 2009a). Additionally, while promoting *Let's Move!* at several historically Black universities, she went to a Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association basketball tournament in North Carolina. After playing some quick basketball with student players, she then talked about the campaign and used her family's love of basketball as a way to both connect to the audience as well demonstrate her credibility and authority for fitness (TeamEbony, 2012). Focusing on her personal workout routine and her physical prowess highlighted her agency. Additionally, she used her symbolic role as national mother to encourage others to act. In both her personal and mother roles, she actively chose to be fit, and by extension, so too can others.

Her workout routines captivated Americans. WebMD called the Obamas "the First Couple of Fitness" (Doheny, 2009), and I argue FLOTUS Obama's success as fit and fitness icon increased from 2009 to present. The ultimate evidence of her physique stemmed from her toned

arms and the frequent baring of her arms in style and fashion. Culturally, Obama's arms are seen as "impossibly perfect" (Stark, 2012, para. 11). Magazines such as *Fitness Magazine* and *Ebony* even offered how to achieve such a look, calling the workout "the Michelle Obama arm workout" (see Alexis, 2012 and Raskin, n.d.). These cultural discourses enabled Obama to more successfully craft her own image of personal fitness and success; the Michelle Obama arm workout then also worked as an aspirational rhetoric, encouraging others to be more fit and to be agents of action regarding one's own body.

Similarly, the campaign promoted fitness images such as Obama dancing, playing basketball, and doing push-ups. One such event highlighted the physicality of her body as she danced along to Beyonce's "Move Your Body" song, did the Dougie dance, some Cha Cha, and the Running Man (DiMargo, 2011, para. 10). By showing Obama dancing in a silk blouse and dress pants, the rhetoric argued that anyone, at any time, in any form of dress, can engage in physical fitness by moving their bodies through dance.

Obama also participated in the toned arms rhetorics, most evident in her two *Ellen* appearances early in 2012 involving a push up competition. In February, DeGeneres asked Obama about her fitness routine. The First Lady stated that she works out every day, for an hour to an hour and a half. DeGeneres jokingly asked, "is an hour of that on your arms?" to which the audience laughed. During the interview, a photograph projected in the background displayed the First Lady and her arms in a sleeveless black dress (TheEllenShow, 2012a). Obama's sleeveless look not only functioned as a fashion trend, but served as a statement of physical fitness where the bare arm demonstrated her abilities regarding fitness, strength, and health. The photograph

along with Obama's physical presence on the show worked together to promote fitness, both of Obama herself and her health based advocacy, including *Let's Move!*.

In addition to the photograph and Obama's presence on the television show, Obama argued by example, through a demonstration of physical fitness—a push challenge. DeGeneres and Obama participated in a competitive push up challenge, to the cheers of the audience, with Obama completing more push-ups than DeGeneres. Obama stated “I just stopped,” implying she could have done more than the twenty-five push-ups she successfully completed. Obama's successful completion showed her commitment to fitness and that her arms' tone were based upon work, rather than luck, genetics, or surgery. The push-up challenge may have been for fun or laughs, given the nature of *Ellen*, but it also demonstrated the physicality and strength of Obama. If she did not have such an extensive workout routine, she could have failed at the competition. Indeed, Obama's quip that she “just stopped” implied that it was easy for her to do the pushups, and the ease came with continual practice and repetition-her daily workouts.

Following the show, news outlets declared Obama the decisive winner, which prompted an April follow-up show (TheEllenShow, 2012b). DeGeneres said, “we should talk about the push up situation.” Obama responded: “you're still bothered by that huh?” to laughter from the audience. She continued, “you're licking the wounds of defeat.” When prompted by DeGeneres to make another comment, Obama quipped, “I could have done 35, I stopped because I felt bad for you.” DeGeneres responded by performing more push-ups for the viewers. The show's segment ended with the contrasting images of DeGeneres doing more pushups to seemingly try to make up for her loss while Obama looks on, in a bright, sleeveless dress, showing off her supple smooth arms. The joking in the April follow-up show used comedy as aspirational:

DeGeneres wanted to be more like Obama and Obama's level of fitness. Obama demonstrated her physical fitness and her arms speak for themselves as evidence of that fitness (the "Michelle Obama arms workout;" see Alexis, 2012). The success of the comedy depended upon cultural understandings of fitness which Obama demonstrated she fit, being thin and toned. This aspirational nature also contained a downfall: that individuals should compete with others (DeGeneres versus Obama) regarding how our bodies look. The idea that someone can do more than another is unacceptable; thus, everyone should continue to work more and more, harder and harder on our bodies, to achieve the fit, athletic, thin ideal.

These physical activities demonstrated the moving part of the *Let's Move!* campaign; Obama as self-advocate showcased how she kept her body fit, toned, and as an appropriate advocate for physical fitness. Rhetoric about her toned arms also utilized the images of her toned physique to argue Obama's physical fitness demonstrates her role as advocate. Not only did she talk the talk, but she danced, basketballed, and push-upped the walk as well. Obama's body drew on a lineage of strength of Black female icons, such as Angela Davis, Pamela Grier, and most notably, Sojourner Truth and her strong arms. Sojourner Truth, in her famous address concerning the role of Black women in society and the need for suffrage, was thought to have bared her arm to the crowd as evidence of her strength, as a challenge to the idea women are weak, and demonstrated her advocacy of Black women's suffrage. Although the exact words and delivery of her speech exist as a fiction created by Frances Dana Gage (Painter, 1996), I agree with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's (2005) argument that Gage's telling of Truth's advocacy "has a dramatic agency . . . agency in vernacular speech and vivid, homely metaphors that speak to all" (p 13). Her strong arms demonstrated her physical strength as well as strength of self. I am



aware that the historical contexts between Obama and Truth varies, particularly regarding class. Truth's strong arms reflect "the back-breaking labor she was forced to do" whereas Obama "has the familiar and professional support to build exercise into her daily schedule" (Cooper, 2010, p. 53). But, both women used their bodies as a form of advocacy, providing visual proof of their prowess. Obama's body stands as representative of her non-weakness by showcasing the body as evidence, visualizing health.

Both Obama and the campaign drew on images and rhetorics of Obama's toned body, specifically her toned arms, to demonstrate her commitment to her personal health and her advocacy. These physical activities demonstrate the moving part of the *Let's Move!* campaign; Obama showcased how she keeps her body fit and toned, and as an appropriate advocate for physical fitness. Her arms then reflected her personal health and the ability of anyone, with enough work and determination, to be as strong as she. Her body stood as representative of her health, showcasing the body as mirror and reflection of a social truth, reinscribing the notion that health = visualization of the body. The toned arms rhetorics then emphasized Obama's agency. However, such agency stemmed from control over her body: Obama tamed a potentially unruly, out of control, disastrous body. These actions of disciplining fit with hegemonic understandings of the thin body as fit or in control, which then extend fat-phobic ideologies (LeBeseco & Braziel, 2001). Within these dominant rhetorics of fatness and obesity, a fat person could not be an agent in control of her or himself, as agency remains tied up with body norms and disciplining. Obama disciplined, controlled, and fit within the body norms and aesthetics, enabling her agency while also precluding agency outside of dominant norms. Obama's bodily

advocacy was limited to a particular understanding of an appropriate body; such agency objectified Obama's body while at the same time also serving as basis for agency and advocacy.

### **Big Butt Rhetorics**

However, not everyone read Obama's body as evidence of health and success, evidenced by the big butt rhetoric. For example, individuals referred to Obama as "Michelle 'My Butt' Obama" and "Fat butt Michelle Obama" (Thompson, 2013, paras. 3-4). The big butt rhetoric attempted to visually contain Obama's power and strength as a Black female leader and advocate by casting her body as unhealthy. It argued Obama was a gluttonous hypocrite who wanted individuals to change but was unwilling to make changes herself, evidenced by buttocks too big to be considered healthy. Such rhetoric operated within the larger historical coding of representations of Black women's posteriors as being overly large and, thus, out of control. The specific reading of her butt as "too big" emphasized her being out of control -- of her body, eating habits, and her behavior as a strong Black woman telling others what to do (the angry Black woman narrative). This set of rhetorics positioned Obama as a threat to the nation in her role as advocate.

In a similar contemporary case, Black physician Regina Benjamin, President Barack Obama's nominee for Surgeon General, faced criticism of her fitness for political advocacy due to her weight, summarized succinctly by this headline: "Is Regina Benjamin too fat to be surgeon general?" (Kissling, 2009). Critics argued Benjamin would not be appropriate for leading the nation on issues of health policy and that she would send "the wrong message as the public face of America's health initiatives" (James, 2009, para. 3). Even with such criticisms, Congress did

confirm Benjamin as Surgeon General. Regardless of the outcome, the fact that individuals felt they could argue against one's candidacy for a position based upon physical fitness demonstrated the power of the seeming overweight or obese body to be used against that person. Indeed, Benjamin faced questions about her confirmation over the years, with headlines such as "The Surgeon General's Weight Struggle" (Parker-Pope, 2010) and allegations of being a hypocrite for discussing obesity (Pittman, 2013). During Benjamin's tenure as Surgeon General, the topic of her weight frequently came up, including during a 2011 interview with the *New York Times* about her life and advocacy as Surgeon General. The reporter stated that "critics tried to disqualify you on the basis of your weight, saying you were perpetuating obesity rather than battling it" (Soloman, 2011, para. 22). Benjamin's response: "My thought is that people should be healthy and be fit at whatever size they are" (para. 24). The continuing emphasis on Benjamin's body and body size demonstrated how advocacy and having an appropriate body go hand in hand. If one does not have a body that meets the criteria for being an appropriate citizen, and especially if one belongs to marginalized group(s), then one faces challenges regarding the ability to be a successful advocate. In Benjamin's case, the intersections of her race, gender, and body size combined to disqualify her from a position that she was confirmed and held for over three years.

Although Benjamin's case focused on her entire body and body size, Obama's critics focus specifically on the size of Obama's buttocks. This buttocks emphasis drew on specific racialized and gendered notions of Black women. Writing extensively on images of Black representation, hooks (1992) argued the focus on particular body parts of Black women, such as the buttocks, drew upon discourses from slavery: "Just as the 19th-century representations of

black female bodies were constructed to emphasize that these bodies were expendable, contemporary messages . . . give a similar message” (p. 64). Similarly, Hobson (2005) argued contemporary images of Black women exist in the lineage of the Hottentot Venus, particularly as the size of her buttocks stood for the grotesque, leading to “black women’s bodies [being] typically ridiculed, not revered” (p. 100). Obama’s butt became coded within narratives of dominant fatness rhetorics as well as narratives of Black female otherness. These rhetorics pointed to a racialized version of fatness meant to disrupt power. Black fat buttocks combined fat grotesqueness with being expendable due to race; as a dual sight of displeasure, disgust, and abjectification, it precluded Black women from being speaking subjects of power.

For example, Wisconsin state representative Jim Sensenbrenner in December 2011 criticized the campaign, stating First Lady Obama “lectures us on eating right while she has a large posterior herself” (Rothstein, 2011, para. 2). Ann Marsh-Meigs, a fellow church member of Sensenbrenner’s, told reporters that Sensebrenner discussed Obama relative to other First Ladies and their projects, saying: “And Michelle Obama, her project is obesity. And look at her big butt” (Bice, 2011, paras. 6, 7). The way Sensenbrenner structured his argument about Obama made several logical leaps. For example, he assumed that Obama’s butt is actually “big” and “large,” failing to recognize that largeness of a butt is relative and grounded within standards of white feminine beauty aesthetics. Additionally, he did not state that a health advocate must be thin, but came to the conclusion Obama is not thin and thus not an appropriate health advocate. Finally, he did not state explicitly that a health advocate should not be seen as hypocritical, but implied that Obama is hypocritical. Grouping together the words

“obesity” and “big butt,” Sensenbrenner read Obama as an inappropriate health advocate. Overall, Sensenbrenner’s comment linked Obama’s body with the *Let’s Move!* campaign, reading her body as too large or big to be considered healthy and, thus, evidence for the failure of the campaign. Although he later apologized for his comments, the fact that he felt comfortable voicing such comments indicates how the First Lady’s body stands as evidence regarding *Let’s Move!* success.

In another similar critique, Rush Limbaugh (2011) called for Obama to demonstrate her advocacy: “If we’re supposed to go out and eat nothing, if we’re supposed to eat roots and berries and tree bark, show us how.” He then explicitly linked her body to success of new eating and exercising strategies, stating: “Ok fine, show us: Haven’t seen any evidence here that the advice if being followed, works.” Her body functioned as proof of failure due to its size; Obama’s body existed out of control and unable to demonstrate a healthy life-style. In this way, her body disqualified her from being an appropriate advocate, as she failed to be an appropriate citizen.

The big butt rhetoric also focused on Obama’s food consumption, particularly focusing on what were deemed “poor” food choices (for more on what constitutes good and bad foods, see Pollan, 2010). For example, in the same radio show, Limbaugh critiqued FLOTUS for eating ribs which were 1500 calories per serving while on vacation. Other reports frequently focused on Obama’s love for French fries. *Fox Nation* (2011) ran the headline: “Michelle Obama: ‘I can’t stop eating French fries. But eat your vegetables’.” During a June 2011 health tour in Africa, when Obama stopped in Botswana, the press commented on her eating a local restaurant which serves French fries

and fat cakes (Bentley, 2011). French fries, therefore, symbolized an ultimate failure or defeat. An American Pundit.com blogger explicitly linked French fries to a lack of self-control and lack of self-advocacy: “The same woman who lectures 300 million people on eating health food and avoiding that unhealthy stuff can’t stop eating french fries. She’s just like her husband, who wants to control everyone else’s health but can’t stop smoking himself” (Tawney, 2011, n.p.). According to this viewpoint, not only was Obama represented as a bad person, she also functioned as an inappropriate advocate for change since she could not control herself or her love of French fries—her self-declared favorite food (TheScholasticChannel, 2012).

These rhetorics focused on her seeming hypocrisy for eating certain foods while she promotes healthy eating. In a 2011 editorial cartoon, these two foods collide: Michelle and Barack share a meal. Pictured as a skinny male with large ears, Barack eats broccoli on small plate. Contrastingly, Michelle, pictured with chubby cheeks, stuffs her face with hamburgers piled high on a platter. Michelle tells Barack: “I’ve stepped up my efforts to control America’s eating habits by telling restaurants to lower portion sizes and fat content” (“Michelle Obama Cartoon,” 2011), again emphasizing a seeming disconnect between talk and action: The cartoon argued she’s hypocritical. The simple act of eating a particular food—ribs, French fries, and fat cakes—serve to visually add on the pounds and disqualify Obama from advocating for healthy eating habits. These food consumption rhetorics engaged in all or nothing argumentation, eliminating the possibility of a middle ground, where one can eat certain foods and be healthy. All these foods rhetorically become coded as bad food choices, evidence of bingeing or failure to make a transition to

a healthy lifestyle; they serve to show how Obama exists as out of control. The distinction between good and bad foods and the overall regulation of food intake then constructs a particular identity; such rules “are an allegory of social concerns, a way in which people give order to the physical, social, and symbolic world around them” (Gerber & Quinn, 2008, p. 2). Continuing the logic of these rhetorics, if she as an individual was out of control, her ability to tell the nation how to live healthy also exists outside her control as an advocate. Coding Obama’s butt as too large and her food choices as unhealthy, bad foods disqualifies her as an advocate, as she was read as stereotypical bossy Black woman or Black matriarch. Her advocacy then becomes out of control or an unruly advocacy tactic.

### **Conclusions**

Michelle Obama as an advocate for *Let’s Move!* stemmed from her personhood, including her body and her motherhood. Although these rhetorics at times offered different framings for how to read her actions, all argued for the First Lady’s fitness as an appropriate social advocate, and in particular, of her advocacy for the *Let’s Move!* campaign. Her use of the Mom-in-Chief role deflected criticism of Black promiscuity, part of the longer social context of Black women’s bodies and the intense attention placed on breasts, hips, and buttocks. Additionally, the Mom-in-Chief role served to demonstrate her appropriateness as a social advocate: Rather than focusing on herself, she put her efforts into her children and the children of the nation. Her toned arms also demonstrated her appropriateness as a health advocate as she met the criteria of good citizen inhabits a good body.

Michelle Obama's corporeal body stood as evidence for such arguments, made by FLOTUS and others. As Obama serves as the United States first Black First Lady, intense scrutiny over her actions and body helps to define what it means to be socially appropriate for public womanhood and for Black women in particular. The majority of rhetoric tended to view Obama more favorably—focusing on her toned arms rather than her big butt; focusing on her mothering rather than usurping the President through her First Lady agenda. However, if the situation were reversed, it is likely that she would not be seen as a successful or appropriate advocate against obesity. In the U.S., where increasing attention is placed on the visuals of bodies and those bodies within places of power and prestige, individuals must take notice of how they look and present themselves. Michelle Obama demonstrated how the corporeal body stood as a synecdochical representative of the nation, and more specifically, that thin, fit bodies rather than fat, untoned bodies constitute appropriate or legitimate forms of citizenship for national display. Ultimately, such rhetorics—although seemingly innocuous—serve to limit who can function as an appropriate advocate for change.



CHAPTER FOUR:  
STOP SUGARCOATING IT!<sup>9</sup>

Recent trends in obesity rhetoric centered on the problem of childhood obesity. The 2010 White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity report argued for immediate action to address the “national health crisis” of childhood obesity in the United States (p. 3). The report opened by calling attention to the implications of inaction by stating “the life-threatening consequences of this epidemic create a compelling and critical call for action that cannot be ignored” (p. 3). The ultimate goal proposed by this task force entailed solving childhood obesity within one generation (p. 9) and urged health campaigns to address childhood obesity specifically.

The increasing political and societal attention concerning children’s obesity illustrates the need for rhetorical critics to focus attention towards such campaigns. Weight loss and obesity rhetorics are culturally pervasive, and intersect multiple fields of inquiry, such as agency, the body, and citizenship, implicating what it means to belong and to be a citizen (see Farrell, 2011). Therefore, these rhetorics communicate what it means to be human, and more specifically, what kind of human subject and citizen one should embody, change, or avoid via their material bodies. One such health campaign is the state of Georgia’s Strong4Life (S4L) campaign, run by Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Inc. (CHOA), and it functioned as a representative example of such bodily citizenship discourses. The campaign situated multiple different discursive formations,

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<sup>9</sup> An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the 98th Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association Conference in Orlando, FL.

including individual responsibility, medical narratives, and children functioning metonymically as the future of the nation.

In this chapter, I analyze the S4L campaign which focused on children's obesity as the major health crisis within the state's populations (see <http://strong4life.com/>). The campaign advocated for a society-level awareness and response, as it argued all Georgians are negatively impacted by the problem. The S4L campaign directed such attention by stating: "Ignoring this problem is what got us here. It's time to wake up" (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, 2011, n.p.). In this way, the S4L campaign drew on the idea of speaking an uncomfortable truth: It called on Georgians to face the problem, arguing one can no longer look away from the fact that fat children exist. Using this uncomfortable truth, the campaign argued rather than ignoring the problem, Georgians need to step up and take action.

To do so, from the beginning of the campaign in 2011 and continuing through early 2013, the campaign utilized images of fat children to spur the audience to action. These images included specific individual children in print or television advertisements and stories on various versions of S4L website homepages. Additional images included graphics of children suffering from adult diseases. The campaign attempted to demonstrate the severity of the problem of childhood obesity and the need to "stop the cycle" (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc., 2012b), their chosen metaphor, of obese children becoming obese adults, and in a sense, eating oneself to death.

However, rather than all Georgians equally sharing the responsibility for change, the specific language, advertisements, and images of the campaign itself centered the

solution on parents and families. S4L criticized parents for not seeing their children's size which was literally right in front of their eyes, identifying parents' current attitudes as contributing to the problem. From the perspective of the campaign's creators, parents are the ones who have the specific responsibility to recognize and stop the problem of their child(ren)'s obesity, and the campaign urges parents to "choose parenting" as a way to resolve the problem.

An image of a fat child disturbed assumptions of children as well as obesity; the juxtaposition of childhood innocence with a fat, unruly or out of control body produced a tension which needed to be rhetorically negotiated. I argue this campaign ultimately resolved this tension by blaming individuals who supervise and parent children, largely mothers. Here the campaign functioned similarly to Cheryl from North Dakota who argued her civic duty to her community required her to forgo Halloween candy to those she deemed fat. Participating in the village to raise a child mentality, Cheryl instead gave the children letters to take home to their parents about their parenting choices (see Chapter one for additional details). Strong4Life took up a similar theme by framing the state's collective civic responsibility as a need to recognize a problem collectively but then called on individual parents to take action. Given how children are seen as part of a collective future, the state or organizations can draw upon this line of argument to make a case for civic responsibility to respond to what has been deemed an obesity crisis. Ultimately, the campaign emphasized the problem as a result of collective lifestyle choices, but then the campaign problematically resolved the public concern by placing blame onto child(ren)'s caretakers, typically the mother.

### **Children's Bodies as Representations of Public Culture**

The social media campaign of S4L drew upon understandings of a healthy child's body, as well as used a "stop the cycle" metaphor to demonstrate the need to contain out of control fat bodies of obese children through parental or family disciplining. Ultimately, the campaign argued such efforts will produce a better society of healthy individuals being fit for citizenship. Messages of the appropriate social body and citizen are enforced through a combination of disciplining the child's body and connecting the individual child's body to a larger sense of the social body and citizen.

How individuals come to understand our bodies, as well as others' bodies, functions within an overall system of discipline and control, organized by rhetoric and rhetorical practices. As discussed in Chapter one, Michel Foucault (1977) argued in *Discipline and Punish* that bodies are produced through strategies and networks of power. Norms and regulations are repeatedly cited, producing discipline, "reducing gaps," and function as "essentially *corrective*" (p. 179). Such processes are learned early; Foucault argued parents use disciplinary measures to correct children's behaviors in an advantageous way: "They make it possible to 'derive, from the very offences [sic] of the children, means of advancing their progress by correcting their defects'" (p. 179). Part of the reason for parental regulation of children is that children serve as a reflection upon the parents' and their moral character. Parents exist as part of the network of disciplinary relations, because they need to educate and discipline their children regarding appropriate behavior. As outlined in Chapter two, two common tropes of bad mothering include failing to protect children and children who go wrong (Ladd-Taylor & Umansky, 1998, p.

3), which are especially related to care through food, as evidenced in this particular campaign. Therefore, bad mothers create a sense of a moral panic which society uses to justify regulation of those who enter into the institution of motherhood.

When children disrupt norms of appropriate behavior, the fault becomes rhetorically assigned to the caregivers or parents. Within the U.S. cultural context of gendered notions of childcare, blame typically becomes attached to mothers. In the specific context of food, eating, and obesity, children are not seen as agents in their own right and responsible for their choices; instead “mothers are viewed as passing on poor eating habits” (Boero, 2009, p. 116). For example, in the recent public health policy debates in Arkansas over school programs and the need to reduce children’s weight, individuals utilized frames of children representing their parents. Anne Gerbensky-Kerber (2011) noted: “Children’s bodies were thus symbolically positioned to inscribe judgments of what constituted ‘good’ or ‘effective’ parenting” (p. 359). In this case, the physical form and body of the child determined the type of parenting: Thin children were rhetorically constructed as healthy and their bodies symbolized “ ‘responsible’ parenting while an obese child’s body signifies ‘irresponsible’ caregiving” (Gerbensky-Kerber, 2011, p. 363). Children’s bodies serve as sites of evidence for what type of care parents give to their children; the corporeal body rhetorically represented if someone was deemed a good/fit parent or a bad/unfit one. If one were deemed culturally to be a fit or good mother, she would be continuing the American tradition of raising and training children to be appropriate citizens, dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries. If she were deemed culturally to be an unfit or bad mother, she would be failing not only her individual

familial unit but also the nation at large, for failing to properly socialize and acculturate children into good bodies fit for being good citizens.

Food itself then becomes a critical site of parental care, discipline, and identity construction (for more on the rhetoric of food, see Frye & Bruner, 2012). Indeed, food is aspirational: “We relate to food in ways that say something about who we are and who we want to be” (Gard, 2009, p. 40). The relationship between food consumption and the physical bodies of children constructs appropriate forms of parenting. For example, Ruth Schwartz Cowan (1997) argued technological advances during the 1950s in household appliances changed family dynamics, so that doing housework became an expression of love from women to their husbands and children. With the specific example of food and feeding one’s family and children, she stated: “Feeding the family was not just feeding the family, but a way to express the housewife’s artistic inclinations and a way to encourage feelings of family loyalty and affection” (p. 336). In this way, being a housewife became linked to the betterment of one’s family, and a woman’s family and children reflect her self-worth. Thus, children’s bodies, and any lack of discipline, reflect on their caregivers, typically their mothers. Although Cowan discussed trends within the 1950s, children being the responsibility and reflection of parents, particularly mothers, continues from 19th century notions to contemporary controversies, as the Arkansas school lunch debate demonstrated.

Additionally, the body of the obese child functions within enabling and constraining norms, which again produce regulation and control. Rafael Antonio Cervantes (2006) noted: “The pathologized unhealthy child function productively,

making possible an entire system of rules, practices, and individuals solely oriented to its management” (p. 2). Thus, the bodies of the children fit within an overall disciplinary regime and function.

Children’s bodies contain double cultural and civic significance: not only are they reflections upon their mothers and their mothers’ ability to craft citizens, but also citizens of the future. In the focus on children’s obesity, children’s bodies stand in as representative of the future of the nation, related to both physical and civic health, again contributing to understandings of the good citizen as embodying a good, fit/thin body. Indeed, the meaning of fatness has become so normalized “that it can be quickly tapped to convey something about the larger improvement or decline in a person’s life” (Farrell, 2011, p. 118). The stories of these individual children represent larger societal understandings, as predictive indicators of what society will (continue to) look like. Perceptions of the body influence perceptions of society, as detailed in Chapters one and two. Stories of a body or bodies serve to situate and create a particular community or society. Bodies are crafted by communication practices as well as the ways we talk about bodies, shaping an understanding of the cultural social body and political subjectivity.

The social body functions as a visible political identity, and rhetoric depicts which bodies and which discourses are deemed appropriate. Chapter two argued the visibility of certain types of bodies relates to acceptability (see Warner, 2002; also, Douglas, 1996, Prelli, 2006). Public displays of bodies, including which types of bodies exist on display as good bodies or through the warning of bad bodies, become central questions for analysis and critical to understanding citizenship more broadly (see Prelli, 2006).

Within the context of obesity rhetorics, the fat body operates as continuations of the mid-nineteenth century idea of the fat body as uncivilized: “The fat person is seen as the degenerate, the one who has moved furthest from the pinnacle of a civilized state, the one who requires a ‘shake-up’ to return to the normal progress of human evolution” (Farrell, 2011, p. 118). The incivility of the fat body disrupts the notions of innocent and carefree childhood. Thus, the fat child functions as a reflection of the caregiver/parent’s failure to adequately discipline and control their child. With such innocence disrupted, the fat child also fails to adhere to disciplining norms of behavior and of citizenship. Therefore, the fat child represents a failed potential citizen, as children exist as citizens-in-the-making and as a reflection of the direction of our society will take in the years to come. With the popular sentiment that children are our future, fat children culturally represent a backwards slide and sense of negative mobility or spiral effect, which the Georgia campaign drew on explicitly with their metaphor of the need to break the cycle.

### **Stop SugarCoating it: Campaign Overview**

The Strong4Life campaign began in early 2011, with a goal of addressing the problem of Georgia’s high rates of children’s obesity problems, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and hypertension. According to Ron Frieson, chair and spokesperson of the campaign, the campaign consisted of three parts: first, to increase the level of awareness of the problem; second, an activation stage (showing a journey to wellness); and finally, discussion of solutions (as cited in Vieira, 2011). Although Frieson argued the campaign would utilize three distinct stages, I argue the parts overlap rather than being



completely discrete stages. Through their website (<http://strong4life.com/>), Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/S4LGA>), Twitter account (@strong\_4\_life), and series of YouTube videos under the playlist entitled “Strong4Life: Warning Ads” (<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3B99758F38961860>), S4L’s rhetoric collectively argued childhood obesity existed as a huge problem facing the entire state of Georgia and the cycle of overeating and bad habits should be broken.

Crystalizing all of these discourses, Children’s Health Care of Atlanta, Inc. developed a video which they first entitled *Stop the Cycle*, and then renamed *Rewind the Future* (see Figures 3 and 4; also, Strong4lifeGA, 2012; Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2013, respectively). As of October 25, 2014, this particular video has been viewed over 4 million times (4,110,002 times; see Figure 5), and is the most watched video out of all the campaign’s YouTube videos, garnering over 3.7 million more views than the second most popular video, *Stop Childhood Obesity: “Why am I Fat?”*, which was viewed 381,613 times. Part of the reason this video has been viewed so heavily is that the S4L campaign prominently featured this video in its social media campaign, including in various iterations of their website, such as the 2011 website homepage (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc., 2011), the learn and access webpages from 2012, 2013, and 2014; a share feature through the website; Facebook posts (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2014a); tweets (Strong4Life, 2012c, 2012d); and on their YouTube channel homepage (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life again, see Figure 5). The continuing influence of this video showcases the scope and direction

**LET'S STOP THE CYCLE.**  
Childhood obesity can lead to heart disease, type 2 diabetes and hypertension—now and in the future.

**STEP 1** | Watch the video to the end and then fill out the form.  
See how our choices everyday can create a dangerous, unhealthy cycle for kids.

239,889 views

Figure 3: S4L *Stop the Cycle* video  
Learn & Stop the Cycle section of 2012 website

### Haven't Met Jim Yet?

You don't want to miss this. Jim—the character in our *Rewind the Future* video—is a man whose life flashes right before his very eyes, unhealthy habits and all. You'll get a shocking sneak peek into the future to see what life might be like for a child who carries unhealthy habits with him into adulthood.



[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

Figure 4: *Rewind the Future* video;  
Learn & Access section of 2013-2014  
S4L website

### Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life

[Home](#) [Videos](#) [Playlists](#) [Channels](#) [Discussion](#) [About](#) [Q](#)



#### **Rewind the Future**

4,110,002 views 1 year ago

Meet Jim—the character in our *Rewind the Future* video—he is a man whose life flashes right before his very eyes, unhealthy habits and all. The choices you teach your child today become the habits they take into their adulthood.

To learn more visit [http://www.strong4life.com/...](http://www.strong4life.com/)

Figure 5: S4L *Rewind the Future*  
video; Featured on YouTube channel  
homepage

of the campaign, and thus, I focus on this video at length before analyzing how the campaign outlined the problem, cause, and solutions to what CHOA identified as an obesity crisis or epidemic.

### **Stopping the Cycle by Rewinding the Future: Jim's Story**

The video entitled *Stop the Cycle or Rewind the Future* showcased the fictional account of a 300 pound<sup>10</sup> White man Jim, by showing his life in reverse chronological order (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc., 2012b, 2012c; Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2013; Strong4LifeGA, 2012). The video appeared on the 2012 website "learn" section as well as on the "Rewind the Future" tab of the "Learn & Access" section of the 2013-2014 website. Additionally, the campaign promoted this video in frequent tweets and Facebook posts, likely contributing to its over 4.1 million views. Although only one example, the video's repeated use in multiple media demonstrated its significance.

The video began with an unnamed adult White male being wheeled in an emergency room (ER) on a gurney, in obvious medical distress as he laid gasping for breath with sweat stains on his T-shirt. The opening shot directed the viewer's attention towards the man's size, as he did not completely fit on the gurney, and his large stomach protruded. The Black male doctor asked the White female nurse for an update on the status of the patient. After she told him the patient presented with a heart attack and provided his statistics, a 5'9" male, 300 pound male at 32 years of age, the doctor asked,

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<sup>10</sup> According to the National Institute of Health's BMI chart, with these statistics, medically this man would be considered morbidly obese, with a BMI of 44.3. The BMI calculator is available at: [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose\\_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm)

“How the hell does that happen?” The video answered this question by focusing on poor food and lifestyle choices. In a series of quick flashed images, the audience experienced the world from the Jim’s perspective. The camera angles portrayed a sense of images that flashed before one’s eyes in near-death experiences: images of Jim’s excessive stomach threatened to break through the frames, emphasizing an out of control consumption as in media narratives, the stomach serves as the “symbol of consumption” (Bordo, 2003, p. 202). This reading is also supported by the specific images of food being consumed: pizza, birthday cakes (where we learn the character’s name is Jim), ice cream, sugary cereals, and soft drinks, all culturally understood as junk food. The images of Jim as an adult and child emphasized poor choices: from eating junk food to playing video games or watching television indoors rather than doing exercise. These choices were traced back to early actions by Jim’s mother: When he was a toddler throwing a temper tantrum his mother solved his meltdown by feeding him French fries. After the French fries scene, the flashbacks stopped and the viewer returned to the present, where the doctor and nurse worked on Jim in the ER.

This video presented the answer to the question of “how the hell does that happen” by showcasing the pivotal beginning moment of the mother feeding her toddler child French fries. The French fries snowballed from one small incident to a cycle or chain of events which continued throughout Jim’s thirty-two years of life, ultimately landing him in the ER. The video showcased the harms of eating certain foods and located responsibility with the parental caregivers, particularly his mother. The poor

choices of the mother then lead to poor choices of Jim as adult, completing and recreating the cycle.

However, the video had two slightly different iterations, with different endings for Jim as well as the ending coda overlaid over the video's ending. In the *Stop the Cycle* version, after the flashbacks, the video returned to the present with Jim heavily gasping for breath. The following statements flashed across the screen: "80% of obese kids become obese adults. We can save our kids. We can stop the cycle. We can Stop Childhood Obesity" (Strong4LifeGA, 2012, 1:27-1:40). After the words "we can stop the cycle," the sounds of the heart monitor flatlined, indicating that Jim died of a heart attack. This ending took a fatalistic or inevitable approach, implying that the cycle of poor parental choices results in a cycle of eating oneself to death. The statistic, 80% of obese children become obese adults, drew on the loci of quantity and the existent (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyetca, 1969, pp. 86, 94). The number 80% represented an overwhelming number of children who cannot break the cycle of overeating and then become obese adults. Not only did the statistic represent an overwhelming majority (indeed, more than three out of every four children), it demonstrated the problem existed now, rather than a possible future. Additionally, the idea of dying from such choices existed in the related loci of "the probable over the improbable" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyetca, 1969, p. 87). Although obesity has not been causally related to death, the video created a link between specific behaviors and certain death by using the sound of the heart monitor flatlining.

Within a health campaign, the use of statistics to support a loci of quantity and the existent demonstrates the need for the public to take action. Coupled with the high

quantity of the cycle of obesity (80%), the existence of obese individuals, and the probability of health problems leading to death, calling forth the audience to be concerned. The “we” articulated here can be seen as part of the larger public, that public support is needed for a public health campaign, to be able to save all of “our kids.” The role of the public then became the need to recognize such a problem; one’s civic duty functioned to regulate the specific size and weight of those in one’s community or state. Even though the specific responsibility focused on those at risk, which in this case, would be parents who make irresponsible choices for their children and thus those parents needed to stop the cycle specifically, the continual use of “we” positioned the viewer as part of the audience. The “we” in the video is called on to “stop the cycle” and “save our kids.” The viewing audience is constituted as caring about the highly quantified, highly probable problem which can result in the ultimate health problem-death. Although this use of “we” could be falsely universal and thus exclusionary (see Beerman, 2006), it functioned to create a sense of community which agreed there was a need to take action on the problem to save “our kids,” even if the solution was ill-defined.

Contrastingly, in the *Rewind the Future* version, rather than hearing a monitor flatlining, indicating death, the visuals ended with the doctor using scissors to cut off Jim’s shirt, with the possibility of saving Jim—a more ambiguous and open-ended closure. The following statements appeared on the screen overlaid over Jim’s body on the operating table: “Your child’s future doesn’t have to look like this [shot of Jim on the table, scissors cutting through his shirt to allow for more invasive medical procedures]. There’s still time to reverse the unhealthy habits our kids take into adulthood. We’ll show

you how. Start here. [strong4life.com](http://strong4life.com) Children's Healthcare of Atlanta" (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2013, 1:22-1:41). Instead of using loci of quantity, the existent, and the probable, the rewind ending used the locus of quality and the value of the person as the basis for change (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyetca, 1969, pp. 89, 95). Rather than focusing on statistics (a loci of quantity), this ending focused on the unique and personal relationship between parent and child, stating that "your child's future doesn't have to look like this." Focusing on the uniqueness and individuality of each child and parent, the video took a personalized approach to the solution of the problem of children's obesity: the parent. Thus, this ending moved away from the public "we" that should care about the problem, even if not need to act, by instead focusing on an individualized "you" that can reverse the problem. The second persona (Black, 1970) here specifically related to parents: The opening words of "your child's future" direct attention to current parents, locating responsibility in the individual parents, rather than as part of a larger societal problem, and thus societal responsibility.

Additionally, the ending in *Rewind the Future* prioritized the need to take action now. Such a strategy was enhanced through the use of the loci of quality, as it oftentimes works with the idea of timeliness: "By making value dependent on a transitory state of affairs, we lay stress on the precariousness of this value" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyetca, 1969, p. 91). The timeliness involved in taking action stemmed from two places: (1) the name of the video, "rewind the future" and (2) the phrase "There's still time." Together, these phrases emphasize a ticking clock but one that can be changed, altered, rewound, and/or stopped. Rather than the ending being already known, such as the highly probable

ending of death as portrayed in the first version of “stop the cycle,” this version of the video emphasized agency of the parents by emphasizing both the timeliness to take action and the sense that one’s actions make a difference, as “there’s still time” to make changes.

And indeed, the phrase “there’s still time” to change presumed the need to make changes based upon the visual evidence of the problem. Although the ending coda differed from the previous version, the overall narrative remained: Jim’s condition resulted from poor choices from his parents, and primarily from his mother. The French fry feeding remained the pivotal incident; as Jim’s mother in the video fed him the French fries, he went down a path of problematic eating, lack of exercise, inappropriate use of electronics (television and video games), and continued such actions with his own children. Both versions of the video blamed the mother for teaching her child Jim irresponsible lifestyles, including poor eating, exercising, and life skills. Here Jim’s mother fit within the role of cultural mother, representing all mothers who make choices about their children’s diet, exercise, and electronic device use time. The narrative framing the video on the Strong4Life website make such connections to other mothers explicitly. On the “confessions from Jim’s mom” opening snapshot, the website stated,

While Jim’s character is fictional, similar stories happen in real life every day across Georgia. Take a look at what Jim’s mom might have been thinking over the years by looking at her diary. Again, her story is imaginary, but perhaps you’ll relate... (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc., 2013c, n.p.)

The framing here drew on the idea of confessional discourse, that Jim’s mom was not living up to her potential, and she acknowledged such guilt. In so doing, she fit within



idea of bad mothering: She failed to protect Jim from harm, as his body went wrong by becoming an obese one. CHOA then drew on the idea of cultural motherhood to judge all women for their parental choices regarding food/diet and exercise. The themes from Jim's video permeate the overall social media campaign: identifying a problem, outlining parental ignorance and inaction as the cause, and providing the individualized solution of parental actions, all of which blame parents for the problem. The next sections detail these themes more fully.

### **Developing the Argument: Laying out the Problem**

Children's Health Care of Atlanta, Inc. situated the problem of children's obesity as a problem for the entire state, by using broad language of the problem affecting all Georgians and the need to take action, with their early tagline of "stop sugarcoating it." From 2011 through 2014, the campaign focused on persuading the audience a problem exists and one that requires immediate action. S4L outlined the obesity crisis in several ways: statistical evidence, bodies of fat children as visual evidence, and arguing obesity fundamentally changes the nature of being a kid.

*Statistical Evidence.* On their 2011 website homepage, the top tagline read: "It took 30 years to get us all talking about childhood obesity. Now let's work together to solve the crisis" (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, 2011, n.p.). This theme continued with their 2013 website. Their "About the Movement" page used graphics, images, and text to visually highlight the social, public problem for Georgians (see Figure 6). The top of the page read: "We have a problem in the Peach State. Nearly 40% of Georgia kids are *overweight* or *obese*. Our childhood obesity rate is the **2nd highest** in the

country” (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, 2013a, n.p.; original emphasis). The statistic of 40% is emphasized through the small stick figures, with four of the figures in purple while the other six in green. The map of the United States served to provide a sense of scale for the national comparison, with blue circle functioning as a spotlight onto the state of Georgia and its problem. The stick figures erased specific individual traits, which

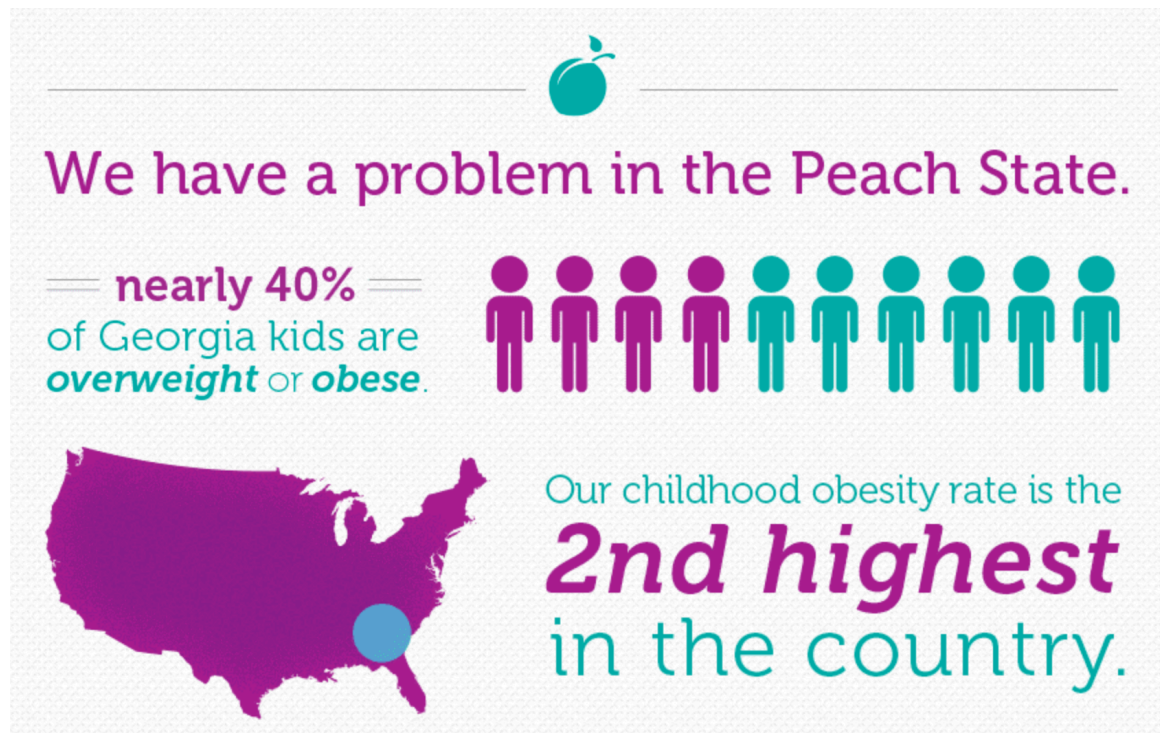


Figure 6: “About the Movement” Page, 2013 S4L website

allowed the viewer to concentrate on the severity of the statistic rather than specific visuals of overweight or obese children. In this way, graphic called on the viewer to read 4 out of 10 (40%) as nearing half or 50%, close to a majority of the community, and that almost any child could be a risk, since the numerical figure was almost 1 out of every 2 children at risk.

Additionally, the use of “2nd highest in the country” called on those in the Peach State to recognize that the state of Georgia was being spotlighted negatively compared to the country. Although in the vast majority of cases individuals and states want to be seen as leaders or number one in a particular area, having the highest rates of a problematic area operate in the reverse. In this way, the graphic drew on negative associations around having high negative statistics to spark concern on the part of all Georgians to care about the problem. The problem is not located within particular families, but within the entirety of the state itself: “we have a problem in the Peach State.” The map highlighted how the problem reflected on the entire state. The early tagline of “stop sugarcoating it Georgia” again demonstrated how the S4L campaign positioned the entire state as a stakeholder, as the state should be concerned about the public health and size of its citizens.

The sense of scale of the problem continued in other graphics as well. On the revised version of the 2013 S4L website, in the “about the issue” webpage, the problem of children’s obesity was again defined statistically: “We have a problem in the Peach State. Almost 1 million children in Georgia are overweight or obese. That’s enough to fill the *Georgia Dome* for *every Falcons game* this year” (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, 2013b, n.p.; original emphasis). These words appear above a seemingly bulging football stadium roof (see Figure 7). Here the campaign again used a statistic, but the number was more culturally seen as extremely large. Even if the figures of nearly 40% and 1 million are the same statistic, the framing of 1 million functioned as larger, as it represented an overall figure, rather than percentage/part of a whole. The use of the word “million” with the visual of the football stadium overflowing and bulging at the seams quantified what a

million people gathered in one spot would look like. The visual took a familiar architectural landscape and changed it into something bursting at the seams to demonstrate the severity of the problem.



Figure 7: "About the Issue" Page, 2013 S4L website

Drawing on the popular sport of American football and the home team of the Atlanta Falcons again called on the audience to identify with the problem facing all Georgians. The use of football stadium also functioned in another significant way: The campaign also used the athleticism of those who normally occupy the field, the Falcon players, with the overflow of stick figures who represented the overweight and obese children, who then were portrayed as unathletic and unhealthy. Certainly not all football players are healthy, given the push for some to gain weight and be bigger and bigger, as well as the rising concern over concussions. However, culturally, the football player is

still understood as a high performance athlete and an NFL player being at the top of his athletic performance to play competitively in the national league. Using the NFL stadium then called attention to address the bulging state problem.

*Bodies of Fat Children.* Images of visibly fat children demonstrated an urgent need for action. Such campaign rhetoric fit within larger cultural understandings of fat children. As Cervantes (2006) argued, children's bodies highlight urgency of the problem:

As bodies that will eventually become unhealthy adults, obese children demand “urgency” and immediate attention. The concern for children as idealized agents of the nation's future naturalizes a conceptualization of children as a signifier for America's concerns with obesity. They are the means through which obesity can be solved and, as such, signify societal fears about the obesity epidemic and ideals for a healthier population. (p. 113)

Children then represent the future. Combining the panic surrounding the future, of the cycle of obese children becoming obese adults, the campaign argued Georgia needed to break the cycle. For if 40% of the population or 1 million children become obese individuals, the problem will continue to cycle again and again. The campaign attempted to demonstrate the severity of the problem of childhood obesity and the need to stop the cycle of obese parents allowing their children to become obese, and in a sense, eating oneself to death. In so doing, the campaign shamed both the children and the parents, for continuing such a cycle.

One of the most explicit uses of visually fat children centered on a series of five advertisements, titled “Strong4Life: Warning Ads” on S4L's YouTube channel (Children's

Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2011e). All of the videos featured fat children, who looked scared and stated they were afraid of diseases and being bullied at school. The children's bodies, by virtue of being overweight, wearing ill-fitting and messy clothes, and the sad looks on their faces, all provided evidence that children's obesity existed as a problem. The call for action was explicit in the ending of the ads, as all stated "Stop childhood obesity" and "strong4life.com" as the final coda. In four of the five ads, the ending coda was immediately preceded by the line: "Stop Sugarcoating it Georgia." In these videos, the children's bodies were used against them as a form of evidence, as being part of the burden of proof that children's obesity hurts (Beerman, 2011). The bodies of the children visually demonstrated the problem of being overweight or obese. The bodies also demonstrated the need for collective attention to this problem, as all Georgians were called to stop sugarcoating it, the "it" being both the problem of the fat children's bodies as well as the need to diet and stop eating so much sugar.

*Fatness Changed the Nature of "Being a Kid."* These "warning ads," coupled with additional campaign rhetoric, including the "stop the cycle" metaphor and additional graphics on the campaign's issue, articulated the immediate need for action as being fat fundamentally changed how the children existed as children. S4L's rhetoric focused on the inability of children to be kids. Being a "kid" implied being free of cares, guilt, and bullying. Kids, from this perspective, deserved caring parental figures who provided healthy lifestyles of appropriate eating and activities. By contrasting inappropriate parental choices concerning eating and activities with appropriate ones, the campaign

argued a problem existed, which parents created, of their children leaving childhood behind.

The S4L campaign argued current everyday activities created a negative progress, which needed to be stopped and reversed or rewound. For example, in the description of the *Stop the Cycle* video, Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc. (2012b) stated:

“Childhood obesity can lead to heart disease, type 2 diabetes and hypertension—now and in the future . . . See how our choices everyday can create a dangerous, unhealthy cycle for kids” (n. p.). Negative, or inappropriate, choices then caused the specific negative health outcomes of diseases. The video articulated specific medical harms including, heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension: The specifics of these diseases fit within the larger strategy of urging the state of Georgia to see the problem, drawing on a framework of health as well as the need to protect children from harm.

These diseases were further contextualized in the *Stop Childhood Obesity: Hypertension* video. In this ad, a Black female, likely a pre-teen, told the viewer, “My doctor says I have something called hypertension. I’m really scared” (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2011a). By using a frightened child, the video positioned the audience as wanting to respond, to comfort and protect her. The audience needed to take action as her body existed as the harm which her parents failed to address. After the child finished speaking, the video directed the audience towards a position by flashing the following statement: “Some diseases aren’t just for adults anymore. Stop sugarcoating it, Georgia” (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2011a). The ad’s rhetoric positioned the frightened child as having an adult disease needing protection. The

highlighting of adult diseases versus “kids” again positioned this particular child (and children she represented) in a position needing help from growing up too fast and no longer being a kid. The choice of the word “kid” further divided and separated youth and adulthood; being a kid rhetorically connoted a time of being carefree, having fun, and no worries, rather than the more clinical version of “child.”

In addition to video depictions of real life children, the campaign also used graphic images representing stick figures of children to discuss the medical harms children face. The 2013 “About the Movement” page and the 2014 “About the Issue” page included a graphic of a stick figure to represent a child’s medical ailments (see Figure 8 below). The tagline above the stick figure read “Because it’s hard to talk about, overweight children now suffer from adult diseases” (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc., 2013a, n.p.; 2013b, n.p.). Circles on the body of the figure point to various diseases: Type 2 diabetes, sleep apnea, liver disease, high blood pressure, joint pain, and high cholesterol. The circle’s positioning on the body indicated the general area of the body linked to the health problem. For example, the circle over the mouth area of the child demonstrated sleep apnea; the circle over the body’s liver represented liver disease, and so on. The use of six pairs of circles to represent six different disease visually created a stick figure’s body in pain. With so many circles, the positioning of the circles, as well as the color contrast between the blue circle and the purple body, made the circles appear to radiate as though the child was suffering in constant pain from these diseases. The use of a stick figure, in the color purple, allowed the campaign to broaden their message to any



overweight child, regardless of sex, race, class, and other identifying social categories that the lived bodies in the warning ads video carried with them, as embodied individuals.

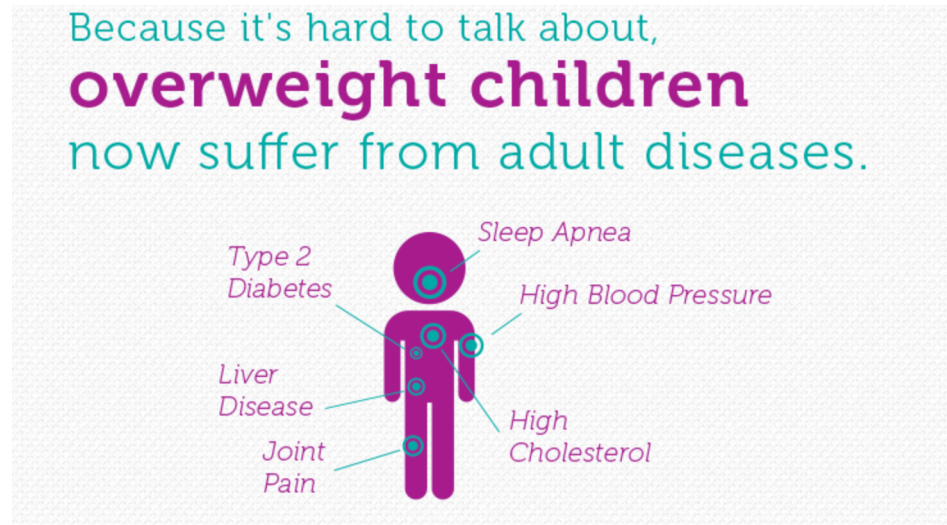


Figure 8: Adult diseases child graphic; Featured on 2013 S4L “About the Movement” page & 2014 S4L “About the Issue” page

Additionally, the use of the stick figure also enabled the campaign to push the ideas of child suffering diseases leading to the ultimate health problem-death. Immediately following the graphic about adult diseases, the campaign used another graphic of a stick family, father, mother, and child (see Figure 9). The three stick figures correspond to culturally understood stick figures; moving from left to right, the figures indicated a man/father, woman/mother, and child. The figures of the parents existed in full color, completely colored in a vibrant purple. However, the child’s image stood in contrast; rather than being a solid purple, the dotted blue outline indicated absence through death. The connection between the blue of the diseases on the overweight child in the previous graphic then became visually connected to the blue outline of the absent child. This stick figure connected to cultural ideas of police outlines of a crime scene,

where a body was removed. The crime scene in this scenario became the family's home, where children should be safe, but the image argued they were not.

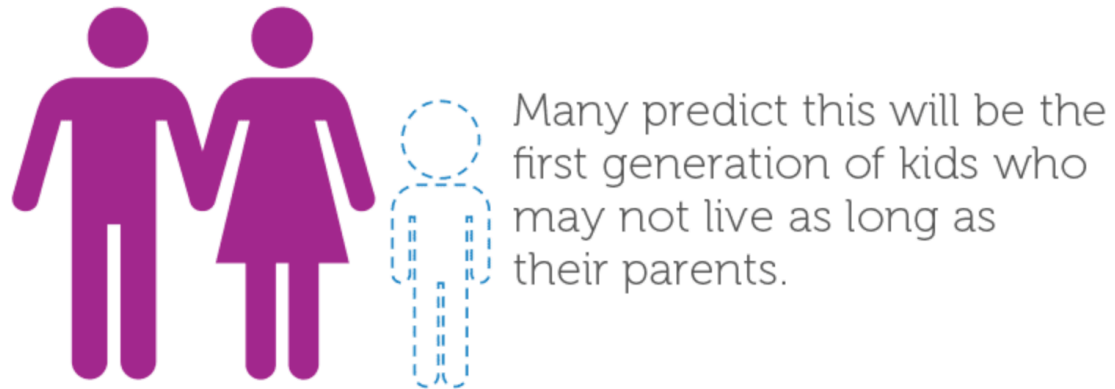


Figure 9: Absent child graphic; Featured on 2013 S4L “About the Movement” page & 2014 S4L “About the Issue” page

The wording next to the image confirmed this reading: “Many predict this will be the first generation of kids who may not live as long as their parents” (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc., 2013a, n.p.; 2013b, n.p.). These two graphics then argued children grew up too soon by having “adult” diseases. Although certain diseases may be more prevalent in children rather than adults (such as chickenpox) or adults rather than children (such as HIV/AIDS), diseases do not discriminate and choose a particular age group to target. The linking of the cycle of suffering and disease demonstrated the destruction of innocence for these children. These graphics argued that although these children had a child’s body in terms years spent alive, the prevalence of these adult diseases meant the child’s body should be read as adult, and therefore closer to death. Thus, the rhetorical construction of certain diseases as adult diseases demonstrated a failure of the parental caregiver in watching over their children, as it implied the child grew up too fast and thus needed public intervention to protect childhood.

The public interventions the campaign called for included Georgians to stop sugarcoating the problem, to “be stronger than the thoughts that hold us back,” and break the cycle (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc., 2013a, n.p. & 2013b, n.p.; see also, Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc., 2012b). The cycle metaphor represented the negative progress of speeding up the end of childhood by advancing towards health problems and a quicker death. Given the American cultural obsession with anti-aging and returning to youthful appearances as well as the role that parents, particularly mothers, are meant to care for children, the campaign articulated a fear of a rapid progression into adulthood and old age to impress the urgency of the situation. Parents are meant to protect their children from harm and shelter them from sensitive, adult material. Allowing one’s child to obtain diseases commonly associated with the elderly (heart disease and hypertension in particular) showcased failure on the appropriate parental disciplining, and again blamed parents.

Indeed, the campaign made this connection clear in the video entitled *Stop Childhood Obesity: Type 2 diabetes*. This video featured a fat Black female teenager with a voice-over from her “momma” confessing her guilt over her child’s weight. Throughout the video, the teen refused to make continuous direct eye contact with the camera, but instead looked to the right and left, with her hands crossed in a submissive pose over her bulging stomach. Rather than speaking, the video featured a woman’s voice-over, who stated:

Being thick runs in our family. As her mom, I never noticed Tameca eating any differently than the rest of us. She likes junk food, but what kid doesn’t? When

her doctor said she had type 2 diabetes, I never thought what we eat made her sick. I always thought she was thick like her momma. (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2011c, :01-:17)

Within this voice-over, two types of knowledge were contrasted; the knowledge of parents compared to that of the medical establishment, with the momma's perspective being deemed inferior. The power of this narrative stemmed from the fact that the mother changed her perspective, rather than a person from the medical establishment. If a mother recognized her own lack, then other parents should listen to her. The mother's confessional and personal testimony then served as a representative example of parental lack of knowledge, including common thinking that children look like their parents, and the need to make a change. Parents were positioned as failing their children, or being weak when providing certain foods (the implication being junk food). Combined with the campaign slogan of "it's time to be stronger than the thoughts that hold us back," these parental failings proved the need for change.

Another modification of the theme of fatness changing the nature of childhood centered more generally on the idea that being fat is antithetical to "being a kid" and, thus, a failure of the fat children's parents or mothers. For example, the videos *Stop Childhood Obesity: Taking the Fun Out of Being a Kid* and *Stop Childhood Obesity: Video Games* both drew on this theme (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2011b, 2011d). In these videos, shown in black and white or sepia tones, a White girl and Black boy both stated that they don't like doing things anymore because of other kids and their teasing. The girl no longer enjoyed school; the boy played indoor video games by

himself rather than playing with others. After the children told their stories with sad looks on their faces, the phrase “being fat takes the fun out of being a kid” appeared on the screen, followed by the exhortation to “stop childhood obesity.” In a third video related to this theme, *Stop Childhood Obesity: “Why am I Fat?”*, a large White boy simply asked his large mother, “mom, why am I fat?” (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2011e). The mother looked across at her child, sighed, and lowered her head as if in shame.

These videos positioned fatness as antithetical to being a kid, by defining being overweight or obese as something only an adult could be, as well as the fact that fatness results in social stigma, which can create conditions which isolate children. Thus, the rhetoric of the videos positioned the adults failing the kids, whereby the children lost their innocence, their ability to have fun, and ability to be healthy due to childhood obesity. The phrase “childhood obesity” again highlighted the fact that adult obesity is the norm of obesity, and children were aberrations from the norm. The marking of the particular disease as occurring in childhood called attention to the fact that supposedly children should not suffer from this disease. Children reflect their parents’ choices, as the institution of motherhood links appropriate children’s behavior with appropriate mothering. These children were positioned as inappropriate or failing to embody childhood; as children are not held responsible for their decisions, and indeed require guidance and direction, the blame for such problems became the failure of parents to appropriately act. As, the caregivers/parents failed their duty towards their children for

not recognizing and/or not acting on the problem, the ads called for the audience to (literally) see the problem in front of them.

### **Confronting the Reality of the Problem: Attitudes as Cause for Concern**

In addition to outlining the problem, the campaign identified the cause as a lack of knowledge and thus a lack of action. On the 2011 homepage, CHOA argued ignorance of the clear and evident problem was the primary barrier to change. In contextualizing the *Stop the Cycle* video analyzed previously, they offered a detailed articulation of the cause. Immediately beneath the video, they stated:

Ignoring this problem is what got us here. It's time to wake up. We can't continue to ignore the fact that Georgia has the second highest rate of childhood obesity in the country. Kids are now suffering from diseases once seen only in adults. Start by joining the community. It's a small step in a long journey, but together we can get there. Now is the time to fight back. (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, 2011, n.p.)

The rhetoric here established the problem as a lack of awareness and the need to be jolted into awareness. The campaign rhetoric called for the audience to take action and be involved in the fight against obesity by being part of a community. The militaristic aspect of the metaphor—fighting—implied both a need to act as well as idea of clear battlelines or sides. However, at the same time, the use of “we” was ambiguous, resulting in an unclear determination of who is at fault, who needed to take action, and who may be excluded from that action.

Building on the previous theme of inaction from 2011, the 2013 and 2014 pages argued parents fail to recognize, and thus respond to, the problem and continue negative thought patterns which prevent action to address their child's weight. Throughout the campaign, the S4L campaign identified the reason for such problems as the lack of parental acknowledgement of the problem: "75% of Georgia parents still don't recognize the problem. (Are you one of them?) Something has to change. It's time to be stronger than the thoughts that hold us back" (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, 2012b, n.p. & 2013b, n.p.). The question to the reader, "are you one of them?" avoided a strong accusatory tone and instead invited the reader/parent to identify as part of solution. In this way, the first step in the long journey is to accept a problem exists, to change one's attitude and thoughts about the size of children's bodies. Anyone in Georgia can change their attitude, and so were encouraged to identify as part of the concerned public. At the same time, the the specific focus on parental thoughts identified those thoughts as the cause for the problem.

Parental thoughts then became identified as the cause of inaction; commonly accepted understandings of weight, such as "being thick runs in our family," carry cultural weight and strength. One needs to be mentally resolved and strong to be able to fight against such attitudes. The metaphorical use of strength connected to the idea of strength of resolve and being physically or mentally strong for one's children. By changing parental attitudes, one can be strong to resolve the problem of thoughts and attitudes.

### **Breaking the Cycle through Choosing Parenting: S4L's Problematic Solutions**

After identifying parental thoughts as the cause for the problem of children's obesity, which placed the sole responsibility for the problem onto families and parents, the campaign called on parents to change. As childhood obesity challenges the liberal notion of individual personhood and control over one's body (Barian, 2011), the campaign placed blame on those who should be able to contain children—their caretakers/mothers. Drawing on the idea that children no longer existed as kids but instead lived in bodies stricken by adult diseases, the campaign argued parents failed to appropriately discipline their children, which resulted in the children becoming fat in the first place.

The need for discipline appropriately, and more specifically to mother appropriately, featured prominently as the solution outlined by the campaign, as CHOA used the slogan of “choose parenting.” The choice rhetoric here drew upon the liberal notion of individuals being able to make choices for themselves, and implied a sense of agency (McCarver, 2011; Williams, 1991). If individuals were to actively choose the suggested action, then the policy would be seen in a good light, as no one would be forced, manipulated, or coerced. However, the rhetoric of choice was merely an illusion designed to imply a sense of agency while covering over the restrictive nature of the institution of motherhood and rhetoric of choice.

As outlined in Chapter two, the cultural institution of motherhood directs all women to act in specific ways, to be a good mother rather than a bad one. Rhetorics of choice intersect with the idea of motherhood, most notably in abortion controversies (see



Condit, 1990; Hayden, 2009; Railsback, 1984). Choice being linked to parenting, and more specifically, mothering practices, draws on the idea that mothers should be selfless for their children, including the cultural pressure to carry pregnancies to term, and also to act in specific ways once their children are born. CHOA's rhetoric drew on the cultural script of Family First (McCarver, 2011). Within the Family First script, women should be willing to sacrifice their own desires, needs, and happiness for their children, and failing to do so means a woman failed at motherhood, being coded as a bad selfish mother (McCarver, 2011, pp. 27, 28; Williams, 1991, p. 1561). Although the language of choice stems from a liberal concept of the individual, when placed into context with motherhood, "the concept of unselfish motherhood trumps individual needs and wants" (McCarver, 2011, p. 28). Thus, by telling individuals to choose parenting, the campaign asked women to forego any current choices and practices that place their children second, such as work, social life, and/or personal life, and instead choose to put their children above all else. By so doing, the campaign co-opted the agentic language of choice, and offered a prescriptive way to act, limiting individual agency.

Additionally, by focusing on choosing parenting, the campaign ignored forces outside of individuals, such as societal, cultural, and institutional constraints. Joan Williams (1991) noted that the selfless woman in the rhetoric of choice obscures any outside forces: "the rhetoric of choice diverts attention from the constraints within which an individual's choice occurs onto the act of choice itself" (p. 1564). In this case, the campaign ignored structural concerns such as poverty, the decrease or elimination of recess and physical educational programs in schools, lack of access to fresh fruits and

vegetables, and instead emphasized that individuals or families needed to take action. By focusing only on the choice of “parenting,” CHOA overly simplified a complex issue by blaming the parent for a seeming failure to make a simple choice to parent.

With fatness resulting from inappropriate parental disciplining, the solution became to choose appropriate disciplining and parenting. For example, combining a still from the *Stop the Cycle* video with a slogan to create a new image,<sup>11</sup> the website introduced the *Stop the Cycle* video: “You can stop the cycle of childhood obesity. Your choices today can lead to a healthier tomorrow. Watch the video” (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc., 2012a, n.p.; see Figure 10). The image featured a downwards camera angle to view a child in a booster seat eating French fries, seated next to a drink. This visual functioned as evidence and backing for the claim that childhood obesity exists and one needs to make better choices. Given the orange color of the drink, coupled with the fries, the implied type of drink was a soft drink, one that is culturally understood to be full of calories and sugary sweet, and thus, a form of junk food. The downward camera angle emphasized the child’s stomach, where the child appeared to exceed the limits of the booster seat, implying a sense of being out of control with eating. This image demonstrated the incongruity between a young, small child and a large, read adult, body. As children do not decide which food and/or drinks to buy, the image implied that this child is overweight due to these poor eating habits, which the parent(s) allowed. Feeding a child fries and soft drink became understood as poor choices, as the text of the image

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<sup>11</sup> I recognize that I am taking some liberties with the word still here. Although technically not a still, as in a photograph taken during production of a video, I use the word “still” here to distinguish from my other uses of the word “screenshot.” When I use the term screenshot, I refer to images I personally captured on my computer. The S4L campaign designed this graphic image from a captured image, or still, from the *Stop the Cycle* video and added the text to the right of the still and placed on its website. Additionally, the overall figure does exist as a screenshot, as I captured the entirety of the image (still, slogan text, and placement on the website) on my computer.

stated choices “can lead to a healthier tomorrow.” The statement that choices can lead to a healthier tomorrow presumed today is unhealthy, in a worst case scenario, or in need of improvement, in a best case scenario.

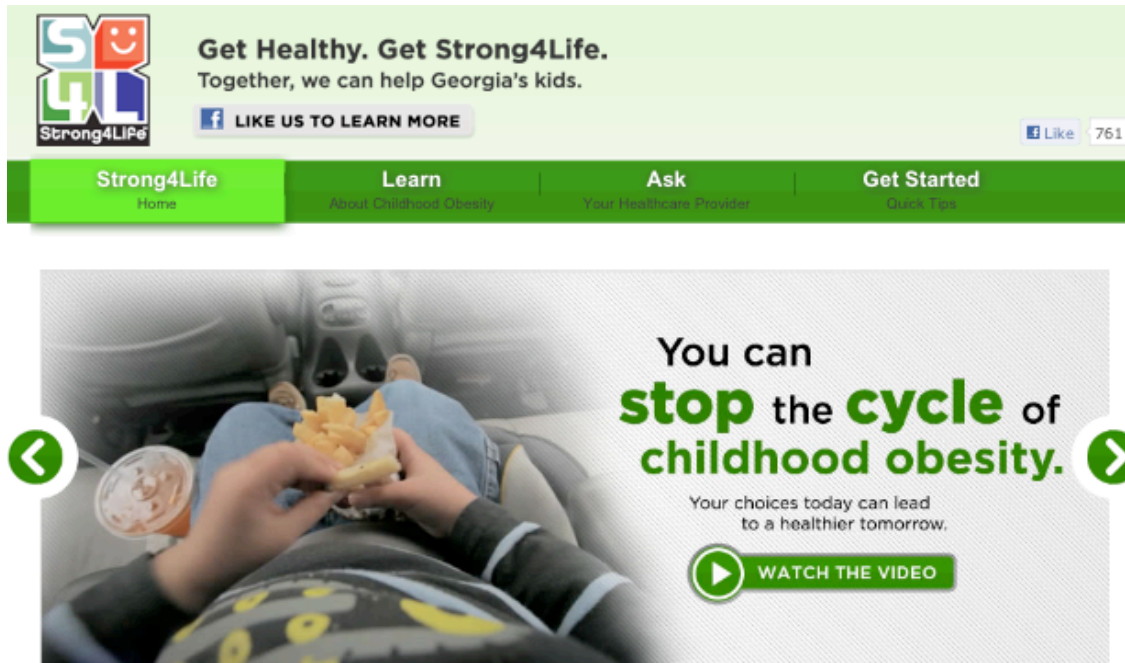


Figure 10: 2012 Stop The Cycle preview page

Again, the responsibility for choices rested on “you,” which theoretically could be anyone. However, the visual of a booster seat inside of a car implied that a caretaker was driving this child somewhere, and allowing the child to eat on the go. Alternative images could have been of a child eating French fries on a school bus, in a school cafeteria, or in a restaurant. A school bus or school cafeteria, as well as a restaurant, would emphasize an different locus of responsibility, including within the schools or those who prepare food for others. By focusing on the inside of a personal vehicle, the visual emphasized the idea of home and parental caregiving. Parents use cars to drive their children places, and they should be responsible for their children's health through eating.

Additionally, as the visual was a still from the specific *Stop the Cycle* video which blamed the mother for feeding French fries, this specific visual drew on that line of reasoning to argue the root cause of unhealthy choices was the the mother. Providing a child with French fries then can cause the spiral of negative food and lifestyle choices. This line of reasoning drew on the idea of the cultural mother who is responsible for her child's actions, including proper nutrition, activity levels, and overall physical and mental health. Thus, even though the "you" could be a more broad sense, the video's image and surrounding rhetoric narrowed the responsibility and blame onto the mother.

The alternative version of Jim's story in the *Rewind the Future* video made the connection to parenting explicit, with the line "Your child's future doesn't have to look like this" (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2013). Although the you of the first version could have been read as anyone, although likely a parent or mother, the second version of the video explicitly referred to parents, by stating "your child." The 2013 and 2014 versions of the S4L website further contextualized the rewind the future video with Jim's mom's diary and confessions that she wished she would have done things differently (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc., 2013c, n.p.). These both pointed to the figure of the cultural mother who stood for the need to mother appropriately.

The specifics of choosing mothering offered a theoretical freedom but really were an illusion of choice. For example, after the image of the child in the booster seat, the 2012 homepage featured the following screenshot of a Black mother Stormy and Black daughter Maya (see Figure 11). The tagline of "choose parenting" appeared on the bottom left hand with mother and daughter embracing one another (Children's Healthcare of

Atlanta, 2012a, n.p.). The rhetoric of choice here implied that previously parents failed to commit to their children and needed to welcome them into a warm embrace of parenting and healthy living. The emphasis in the homepage screenshot of “stopping the cycle at home” and healthy living as a “family matter” again emphasized the proper place of change as within the family and within the home. The warm embrace between mother and daughter implied not only better physical health, but better emotional and familial connections by choosing and committing to parenting. The campaign rhetoric positioned



Figure 11: 2012 S4L Homepage: Maya’s Story

choosing an appropriate type of parenting as the ultimate solution. The focus on breaking the cycle at home situated the appropriate measure of the solution as within the home—within the realm of the parent, and most frequently, the mother. Failing to choose parenting then meant failing one’s children and being a bad mother.

Such a strategy continued through social media messages (Twitter, Facebook) and physical billboards centered on the family or parenting roles as solutions. Tweets

connected the need for better parenting skills and choices as a way to break the cycle of obesity. In the most direct tweet, CHOA stated: “Our new ads ask u [sic] to consider how parenting roles impact family behavior to Stop the Cycle of childhood obesity” (Strong4Life, 2012a). The ads referenced here included billboard advertisements which used the word “choose” followed by what one should do, or not do. All the advertising slogans used a short phrase, in the form of an antithesis, to demonstrate that should be done to replace negative behavior. Examples included: “choose outdoor games, not video games” (<http://ow.ly/i/xthU>), “choose to run around, not sit around,” and “choose fruit, not fruit flavored” (<http://fb.jsondemand.com/choa/choose-parenting/choose-parenting-tab.html>). All advertisements included the phrase “Choose Parenting” in the top right hand corner of the billboard. Additional tweets encouraged similar actions, such as encouraging the parents to be involved in physical activity with their children: “Need a new outdoor activity to help keep your children active? Reinvent a game like freeze tag and allow him or her to make up the rules!” (Strong4Life, 2012b). Specific food advice continued, as evidenced by a Facebook post stated: “Don’t be fooled! Just because it says 100% juice doesn’t mean that it’s healthy. Serve pieces of real fruit because it has fiber and other nutrients that juice misses!” (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2014b). Additional rhetorics of choosing parenting occurred on their Facebook page, such as the following: “We know that choosing to be a good role model for your children can be tough. How do you choose parenting even though making good decisions for your family can be hard sometimes?” (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2012). Even when not using the specific phrase “choose parenting,” the idea

of choosing to be a better parent continued. For example, a Facebook post quoted one of the CHOA doctors, Dr. Stephanie Walsh as saying: “ ‘We’re hoping that parents take away the fact that they have the ability to impact their child’s future and their child’s health’ ” (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life, 2014a). These tweets, advertisements, and Facebook posts offered specific parenting advice, implying that current choices failed in some way, and thus change was needed for the sake of the parents’ children.

The rhetoric of choice in these tweets, billboard advertisements, and Facebook posts simplified complex decisions into a simple choice. For example, the focus on physical activities, including outdoor games and running, implied that current indoor and outdoor activities do not provide enough stimulation, both mental and physical, for one’s children, and thus the tweet and billboards offered a seemingly simple solution parents can do. This framing made it appear as parents made poor choices, when in reality, these choices are not available to all parents as this solution ignored the structural realities that many parents face. If a parent works outside the home and does not have access to childcare, if the community one lives in lacks safety, and/or if the outdoor environment lacks green spaces to play outdoors, then outdoor activities are not actual options. Similarly, the decision to buy fruit flavored products, including pre-processed fruit juice, rather than fresh fruit ignored choices parents face regarding their monthly budget, access to such products, and issues of poverty. Fresh fruit costs significantly more than fruit flavored products and fresh fruit may not be available in all areas, due to food deserts. Thus, these seemingly simple choices are not simple at all: by focusing on individualized

solutions, it blamed parents while obscuring the limitations which prevent parents from taking action.

The campaign's rhetoric exhorted the role of parents to choose appropriately, for their children and children's future. The repeated phrase of "choose parenting" and modeling behavior functioned to discipline parents into a particular kind of parenting model—one in which they take an active part in their child's life as the parents become the one who is responsible for their child's weight and fatness problems. S4L's rhetoric reduced the problem of overweight/obese children to a problem caused by the parents, and thus the parents are the ones who should take action. The campaign then positioned parents of overweight or obese children as failing to choose parenting by making poor choices, and thus in need of public disciplining. Although there was seemingly a form of agency through the choice of parenting, the way CHOA used the choice rhetoric erased agency from parents and instead utilized another scare tactic to urge individuals to act in specific ways.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The way that CHOA outlined the problem, cause, and solution to the crisis of children's obesity functioned problematically, in the way the public health campaign was designed as well as for understandings of public citizenship. By using the language of agency and choice, as well as the publicness of the problem, CHOA appeared to be advocating for everyone's best interest. However, the campaign instead directed attention away from political, social, cultural, and institutional aspects which influence health by focusing on the family and home, instead emphasizing personalized, consumptive



citizenship. With the specific case of childhood obesity, the framing of the problem and solution operated within the individualizing rather than systemic frame, which effectively limited the government's role to distributing information (Lawrence, 2004).

First, by only highlighting the visibly fat children in their videos, the S4L campaign continued the presumption that fat equals bad and skinny equals good. However, weight alone does not adequately predict health (Bacon, 2010; Wann, 2013). Thin bodies can still have health problems; if a thin child only ate French fries but had a high metabolism which burned off the calories, the child still would not have adequate nutrition. By focusing on weight specifically, the campaign restigmatized both fat children and their parents as the problem, ignoring structural constraints and overhighlighted the physical/corporeal body as evidence for their argument. The stick figures of children did not correct this problematic, as stick figures are not meant to be drawn to a particular size, and the presumed child within the stick figure represents an overweight or obese child, although not literally, but figuratively.

Second, according to the campaign, the bodies of children functioned as failed potential citizens needing regulation of one's weight from their parents or families, so that society as a whole will benefit from breaking the cycle of obesity. The narratives structured in a way that placed responsibility upon their parents, rather than showcasing a larger circumference of responsibility, including structural, attitudinal, or philosophical changes (for more on these inherent barriers to changes, see Olson, 2008). Thus, although a public health campaign, the only necessary action from the public involved the need to recognize the problem and discipline parents into appropriate actions. Even though the

public, from the campaign's point of view, would agree that the issue impacted all of Georgia, only a select few, parents, were deemed responsible for taking action against the problem.

Such a move is troubling for public health campaigns, as well as public advocacy campaigns. Rather than clearly identifying the public as stakeholders invested in and responsible for change, the campaign focused solely on parents or caregivers as the responsible party to make changes for and with their children. For example, the S4L campaign focused on individualized solutions, such as awareness, liking their Facebook page, watching their break the cycle video, having "the talk" with one's child about weight, and choosing parenting. All these solutions required individual parents and families to be the ones to take action to impact children's weight and health; none focused on public solutions. Institutions remained absent from discussions of the S4L's depiction of the problem or solutions: No attention was paid to access to food or lack thereof in food deserts, income inequalities, school lunches, and many more structural barriers to change. Ignoring such barriers ensures that those causes will continue.

Additionally, positioning the change for public policy problems solely onto the individual/parent precludes sharing and distributing the burden of change onto the larger public. Such a narrowing of the idea of citizenship poses problems for how society should address issues of public concern. CHOA's call that "we can't continue to ignore the fact[s]" failed to truly address us all; rather than addressing all people as citizens, working to find answers to a common, public problem with a corresponding public

solution, by framing the solution as individualized parental concern, CHOA undercut the very rationale of the publicness of the problem.

This case study demonstrated the need to pay attention to the ways organizations and advocates seek change; although S4L's campaign slogan of "stop the cycle" directed attention to both a problem and a solution, the same metaphor identified the cause by blaming the caregiver/mother for her children, and then disciplined both mother and child for bodily sins. The children's material bodies served as evidence of mothering failings; such a rhetorical strategy highlighted a visible body marker as evidence for campaign claims.

By drawing on the idea that children reflect both their parents and future citizenship, the case study of S4L offers a new way to conceptualize embodied citizenship. The fat child stands as a representative of a future failed citizen because of their parent(s), namely their mother. Children functioned as failed due to their unlivable bodies; their bodies contained adult diseases, would not last to adulthood, and had left childhood behind for the limbo of quasi-adulthood in an inappropriately sized body. All these themes from the campaign's framing of the problem created a form of hidden violence: The campaign blamed parents for their children's current suffering and eventual death. Although seemingly innocent or mundane discourses, I draw here on Arthur Kleinman's (2000) call to see hidden violence, the violence that is "multiple, mundane, and perhaps all the more fundamental because it is the hidden or secret violence out of which images of people are shaped, experiences of groups are coerced, and agency itself is engendered" (p. 239). The campaign coerced parents into thinking that only one

solution existed: choosing parenting. In this way, parental agency is not only restricted, but violence is done to fat children, and their, presumably, fat parents by creating the impression that the only appropriate, legitimate, and worthy form of mothering and parenting focuses on weight reduction. The choice of parenting then coerced a specific course of action, demonstrating violence done to parental figures by limiting their own agency.

Additionally, to draw attention to the problem, the campaign needed to punctuate the accepted viewpoints of the status quo, where Georgians were “sugarcoating it.” To do so, CHOA drew attention to children’s fat bodies as abject, unlivable bodies which suffer and are subjected to violence from the ones who should care for them, most particularly their mothers. The fictional story of Jim is very instructive here. Jim is unruly in a typical sense; as a child, Jim acted out, but his mother enabled his unruliness, resulting in his body being uninhabitable and unlivable. Jim’s mother then became accountable for all of Jim’s choices, as a child and as an adult. As she committed violence to him, she represented the failings of motherhood and the need to take a different course of action. The campaign’s rhetoric offered their solution as a way to make children appropriate and livable again, both in terms of longevity as well as subjectivity.

This case study added to conversations regarding the body and citizenship, by demonstrating how messages concerning obesity were rhetorically negotiated by using a framework of parental choice to solve the problem, which removed societal responsibility. Additionally, the Strong4Life campaign demonstrated how normalizing a particular body type, in this case being thin, functioned as problematic: CHOA argued

children currently existed as unlivable bodies in inhospitable spaces of their families and homes, all to urge action. Calling these children unlivable created a form of violence, by rearticulating children's bodies as unruly, out of control and in need of appropriate parenting and disciplining: These children were not really people, but a disturbance of the appropriate bodily order.

Additionally, the focus on parents removed societal responsibility to examine other causes. The audience can then passively view suffering (children's obesity as outlined by the campaign) and blame another, making themselves feel better. Kleinman (2000) argued that distancing ourselves from the problem recreates violence: "The appeal of experiences of suffering to mobilize solidarity and social action are transformed via the media in a dismay of images. We are outside the field of responsibility; we need feel nothing, risk nothing, lose nothing" (p. 232). The audiences of non-parents or non-Georgians can then pass judgment on Georgian parents for such problems, as they are not the ones responsible: The way the campaign identified the cause and solution allowed those audiences to feel better as they would not need to change of their ways, and thus, no need for action.

Health campaign advocates as well as those concerned with citizenship need to be wary of claims of the body operating as evidence of success or failure. Focusing on the body as evidence of mothering or parental success, of citizenship status, and the future of American society recreated the very violence and limits that the campaign set out to address.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

WHEN STANDING FOR JUSTICE, REMEMBER THE MESSAGE<sup>12</sup>

Although dominant rhetorics of fatness and obesity argue fatness exists as a problem and fat bodies as out of control, fat activism counters these ideas. Fat activism draws on the idea of social justice concerning weight and fatness; proponents work to reclaim fat as a positive identity, social status, and category. One specific and recent example of fat activism is the response to the state of Georgia's Strong4Life (S4L) anti-childhood obesity campaign, as many fat activists critiqued the campaign, arguing the Georgia campaign fat shamed individuals (Campos, 2012; Gray, 2012; Jonassen, 2012a, 2012b). These arguments drew on a long lineage of argumentation within the fat activism community.

This chapter analyzes one specific fat activist response to the Georgia S4L campaign through the I Stand Against Weight Bullying Tumblr and Facebook page (hereafter I Stand). Organized as a grassroots collective effort, the Tumblr consisted of 333 images, self-titled STANDards, published from January through September 2012. The Facebook page included less overall images than the Tumblr, and although some of the images were repeated between the two social networking sites, some were not. In particular, the Facebook page included a more diverse racial population, including STANDards from fat Black models from Full Figure Entertainment, an entertainment company and modeling agency focusing exclusively on showing positive images of fat women, the vast majority of whom are fat Black women (Full Figure Entertainment, n.d., n.p.). Between the Tumblr and Facebook page, the entire collection of

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<sup>12</sup> An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the 37th Annual Meeting of the Organization of Communication, Language, & Gender in Houghton, MI.

STANDards responded to the specific Georgia Strong4Life campaign, and in some cases, also responded more generally to weight, fatness, and bodies in public.

The I Stand campaign argued for a different understanding of citizenship than the dominant framings of the good citizen as good thin body detailed through the previous chapters. This campaign redefined good citizenship as good action, more specifically as mothers or mother figures standing for social justice, instead of the good citizen being defined by the aesthetic look of the corporeal body. Thus, the campaign attempted to break the linkage of good citizen means good body, by arguing against normative conceptions of beautiful and healthy bodies. At the same time, the campaign drew on the same motherhood ideology of a good mother should protect and care for children, although how this campaign defined good mothering differed from Obama and S4L. Both of these moves attempted to redefine good citizen as good action. Although the entire collection of images offered an interesting counter to the dominant framings of fatness, for the purposes of this chapter, I focused on three particular images from the social media campaign: (1) the first STANDard featuring Marilyn Wann standing against fat hate, featured on Tumblr as well as Facebook (see Figure 13); (2) the STANDard featuring a fat woman standing between children and cowardly bullies, featured on Tumblr (see Figure 14); and (3) the STANDard featuring Full Figure Entertainment model sitting for justice for fat mothers everywhere, featured on the Facebook page (see Figure 15). These three images offered a mixed response to dominant fatness and individualized, bodied citizenship discourses. I argue that Wann's STANDard, although an example of using the public screen to gain prominence, failed to fully articulate a pro-fat identity by rejecting what she stands against while also mirror-matching the S4L campaign and thus failed to be oppositional. The other two STANDards offered an

alternative framing of fat bodies by focusing on specific actions for social justice. However, the cowardly bullies STANdard also failed to redefine fatness and/or fat identity, by mainly arguing against bullying. The sitting mother STANdard offered the most specific challenge to individualized citizenship of the thin body by rearticulating the fat body. By utilizing the frameworks of civil rights, motherhood, and the fat body as oxymoronic and the Laughing Medusa, her STANdard offered an alternative view of fat subjectivity and citizenship. An analysis of these three STANdards demonstrates the importance for social media campaigns to not simply critique or attack but to use the public screen to emphasize alternatives, particularly on extremely controversial issues. The various STANdards also demonstrate the difficulties in redefining individualized, bodily citizenship, but conceiving of the fat body as oxymoronic and a Laughing Medusa can serve as a form of resistance. This chapter outlines a brief history of fat activism, alternative theories for viewing the fat body, and then analyzes the three particular images.

### **History of Fat Activism**

Fat activism draws its roots from 1960s liberation movements, including fat liberation, women's liberation, and civil rights. For example, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), created in 1969, works for fat advocacy, analogous to how the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) works for ethnic and racial justice (Solovay & Rothblum, 2009, p. 4). The Fat Underground formed in 1973 to assert the right of women to take up space: physically, socially, and politically. Focusing on the need for self-acceptance, Vivian F. Mayer's (1983) chapter in the ground breaking text *Shadow on a tightrope: Writings by women on fat oppression* argued anti-fat discourses create illusions of



fatness, including personal control, freedom of choice, and autonomy. She argued the next step in women's liberation and the feminist movement is fat liberation: Fat people need to come out of the closet and accept themselves. Mayer's argument functioned in parallel to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's (1973) argument that women's liberation in the 1960s used strategic techniques to violate "the reality structure" (p. 83), and for the need for consciousness raising. Although the focus on individual fat acceptance has been critiqued as failing to address the correct audience of the public (Mack, 2007), failing to promote acceptance of all body sizes (Brown, 2005), and failing to build a "broad-based coalition that seeks to enhance structural bridges between factions" (Whitley-Putz, 2004, p. 226), arguments for fat acceptance and the idea of fat as beautiful still create powerful forms of identity (for a more recent application of consciousness raising within fat acceptance, see Courtney, 2008).

One way fat liberation, fat acceptance, and fat activists work towards acceptance of fat as a positive identity stems from critiques of the medical establishment. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, the NAAFA and The Fat Underground both "viewed the effort to eradicate fat people via weight loss as a form of genocide perpetrated by the medical profession" (Solovay & Rothblum, 2009, p. 4) and focused advocacy efforts against such studies. Also working against the medical establishment, and specifically responding to the ideas that women should diet and seek psychological or psychiatric treatment to control disordered eating contributing to one's large size, Esther D. Rothblum and Laura S. Brown edited a 1989 collection entitled *Fat oppression and psychotherapy: A feminist perspective*. This collection analyzed the connection between feminist psychotherapy and fat oppression, concluding therapy needs to reject its fat oppressive attitudes. Specifically, drawing on ideas from women's liberation and Betty Friedan's

(1963/1983) *The Feminine Mystique*, Brown (1989) argued that fat itself is not the problem; instead, fat-oppressive attitudes functioned as the real problem, dubbing them the new “problems that have no name” (p. 19). Today, fat activism continues through the Health At Every Size (HAES) philosophy and movement, which argues the war on obesity fails and the diet industry along with medical profession have a vested interest in selling anti-fat attitudes to sell products and services (Bacon, 2010, pp. 274, 276). Linda Bacon, a nutritionist professor and researcher at the University of California, Davis, outlined the HAES manifesto, which includes the following four principles: (1) accept one’s size, (2) trust oneself to find own body’s weight, (3) adopt healthy lifestyle habits, and (4) embrace size diversity (2010, pp. 277-278). Overall, HAES rejects the goal of weight loss, instead focusing on “self-acceptance and healthy day-to-day practices” (Burgard, 2009, p. 42).

Such beliefs built on Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran’s 1973 Fat Liberation Manifesto which argued fat people deserve respect, recognition, and equal civil rights. They positioned their manifesto intersectionally: “WE see our struggle as allied with the struggles of other oppressed groups against classism, racism, sexism, ageism, financial exploitation, imperialism and the like” (p. 341). They end their manifesto by calling for collective action: “FAT PEOPLE OF THE WORLD, UNITE! YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE” (p. 342). The phrase “nothing to lose” stemmed from a double meaning: nothing to lose by organizing together as the status quo already limited one’s options as well as nothing to lose in terms of size, as one should accept their size. This manifesto informed the goal of current fat studies scholarship, which includes the goals of “equal rights and social justice for fat people” along with seeking “to understand the

intersection of body weight with gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and sexual orientation” (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012b, p. 634).

Drawing upon this rich history of liberation movements, collective action, personal action, and fat studies scholarships, most of contemporary fat activism utilizes the Internet and blogs to distribute their ideas, creating what activists called the “fatosphere” to promote their activism (Rabin, 2008). Some representative blogs include *Dances with Fat*, with the tagline “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are not size dependent” (Chastain, n.d., n.p.); *Fat Heffalump*, with the tagline “living with fattiude” (Kath, n.d., n.p.); and a blog dedicated to showcasing other fat activist works entitled *Notes From the Fatosphere*.

In this way, fat activism uses the public screen to disseminate their political message. Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples (2002) outlined their theory of the public screen: Rather than public deliberation only existing in face to face situations, evidenced through the public sphere, now public advocacy, activism, and deliberation draws upon visual images which exist on multiple screens. Activists responded to media culture which prioritized visual images by utilizing the public screen of media to engage in political, democratic participation, creating “citizenship in our present moment” (p. 131). Through the use of image events, activists can disseminate their particular point of view. Although the screens that DeLuca and Peeples outlined included television, the front pages of newspapers and the computer (p. 131), I argue the prominent screen for the public now centers on social media, viewed through the multiple screens of cell phones, iPads, e-readers, and computers given the rise of social media in the last decade as a way to freely share information to large groups of people. Focusing on media serves an important function; “media produce culture, but they are also the primal scene upon which

culture is produced and enacted” (DeLuca & Peebles, 2002, p. 132). Additionally, in Damien Smith Pfister’s (2014) *Networked media, networked rhetorics*, he argued scholars need to pay attention to how networks, including the blogosphere, change the nature of public deliberation. I build on these contributions to argue use of the public screen and networked social media exist as a way to enact individualized, personalized citizenship: connecting different individuals through the use of social media to both disseminate one’s message as well as to organize. Looking at the public screen of the fatosphere and social media contributes to understandings of the modern fat activist and fat acceptance movement as well as understandings of individualized citizenship.

### **The Fat Body as Oxymoronic and a Medusa Laughing**

Moving from understandings of fat activism, I now turn to alternative conceptions of the fat body and fat individuals as subjects. Fat activism as a whole rejects placing the thin body at the center of analysis. Hélène Cixous and her project of *écriture féminine* offers a theoretical framework of the body which rhetorical critics and fat activists should pay attention to as one way to reject dominant fatness discourses. Although Cixous largely wrote within a psychoanalytic tradition, her project and goals functioned similarly to rhetorical critic Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s (1973 & 1999) notion of women’s liberation as oxymoronic: Both Cixous and Campbell urge a re-examination of the female subject within language by challenging traditional understandings of female speaking subjects. The metaphors of the oxymoron and the Laughing Medusa both reoriented understandings regarding subjectivity, by calling on the audience to change their understandings of themselves and then empower others. Rhetorics of the fat woman as unruly, out of control, and lacking parallel their work, as dominant rhetorics of fatness and obesity locate the appropriate speaking subject as thin, toned, and fit. Embracing the fat body

encompasses both of Campbell and Cixious's forms, oxymoronic and Laughing Medusa, creating an alternative subjectivity.

Building on Campbell and Cixious's contributions, I argue feminine writing can also include embodied visual rhetorics by focusing on the fat body in particular. Rhetorical scholars should recognize that the body itself enacts writing, to see the body as writing. The body can be a powerful material and visual enactment of Cixious and Campbell's alternative subjectivity, particularly in the case of fat bodies. As an oxymoron and Laughing Medusa, the fat body redefines the consumptive element of citizenship, where the body stands as evidence of being a good or bad citizen.

Additionally, images produced using the oxymoronic and Laughing Medusa frames enables an alternative subjectivity which also calls for collective action, which enables both liberal and republican notions of citizenship, being individualized in one's body and also focused on collective and institutional changes. In Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites' (2007) work *No Caption Needed*, they argued photographs and specifically photographic journalism functioned as a key part of liberal-democratic citizenship, as it encouraged emotional identification, showcased an individual as aggregate for a community, and can redefine relationship among individuals (see pp. 17, 18, 21, 301). More specifically, they advance the idea that the photograph creates, or forecloses, relationships between viewer and photographed subject:

From [the liberal-democratic] perspective, one can consider how any particular photo equips the viewer to act as a citizen, or expand one's conception of citizenship, or otherwise redefine one's relationship to the political community. And one also can ask

whether an image might foreclose on some possibilities for action, restrict civic membership, or otherwise limit identification with others. (p. 18)

Photographs of bodies, and which bodies are displayed, then implicate the nature of relationship between the public (viewer) and photographed subject. In the case of *I Stand*, each individual STANDard argued a relationship within the public and how people should, or should not, read all fat bodies and thus fat people. This relationship between public and fat bodies argued for membership inclusion and identification rather than exclusion. This section examines Campbell and Cixous's theories in depth to showcase how they offer important insights into understandings of the fat body as well as for enacting citizenship before moving to the specific case study of the three individual STANDards.

In her groundbreaking work *Man Cannot Speak for Her* (1989a & 1989b), Campbell recognized that women do not have the same rhetorical tradition as men. More specifically, she argued woman exists as “other” within rhetoric: “Men have an ancient and honorable rhetorical history. . . . Women have no parallel rhetorical history. Indeed, for much of their history women have been prohibited from speaking” (1989a, p. 1). Part of this stemmed from the fact that the qualities of a rhetor, including “self-reliance, self-confidence, and independence . . . [constituted] a violation of the female role” (1973, p. 75). Therefore, women traditionally have not been recognized as legitimate speaking subjects, particularly in the public realm.

To highlight the difference between more traditional and feminist approaches to social change, Campbell (1973) argued women's liberation is oxymoronic: “Only the oxymoron, the figure of paradox and contradiction, can be its metaphor” (p. 84). Reflecting on her work over twenty-five years later, Campbell (1999) still maintained the oxymoron metaphor is useful for

understanding feminist rhetoric. She powerfully stated: “I still think of the position of women advocates as oxymoronic because of the competing demands involved in the roles of woman and speaker” (p. 142). As such, feminist rhetoric challenges the very underpinnings of patriarchal ideology, whereby “it attacks the entire psychosocial reality, the most fundamental values, of the cultural context in which it occurs” (1973, p. 75). Rhetors arguing for female empowerment as well as policy changes to address patriarchy challenge the very assumption that women are secondary, and thus inferior, to male rhetors.

Additionally, although the audience may engage in feminist liberation struggles differently, the beginning step is recognizing that one needs to reorient her/his own thinking regarding subjectivity. As Campbell (1973) concluded, the enemy is in one’s head: “whatever liberation is, it will be something different for each woman as liberty is something different for each person. What each woman shares, however, is the paradox of having ‘to fight an enemy who has outposts in your head’” (p. 86). Thus, a fundamental part of recognizing female subjectivity includes consciousness raising and empowering women as speakers; for feminine style, “the goal of such rhetoric is empowerment . . . Given the traditional concept of womanhood, which emphasized passivity, submissiveness, and patience, persuading women that they could act was a precondition for other kinds of persuasive efforts” (Campbell, 1989a, p. 13). As women were excluded from the traditional rhetorical tradition, a new understanding of their place was needed in order to counter them as other, which was taken up by fat liberation and fat activism as outlined earlier in this chapter.

In a similar vein, Cixous challenged how theorists Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan subordinated woman to man, creating her as the other who is lacking. Although Freud and Lacan

differentiated between the conceptual phallus and physical penis, their theories both placed men and women into unequal relationships: “According to Lacan, the phallus is distinct from the penis; however, while no one possesses the phallus as such, men and women occupy a different relation to it owing to their asymmetrical positions in the symbolic order” (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 1997, p. 163). Cixous saw this dilemma as a philosophical question: “Philosophy is constructed on the premise of woman’s abasement. Subordination of the feminine to the masculine order, which gives the appearance of being the condition for the machinery’s functioning” (Cixous & Clément, 1986, p. 65). Thus, Freud and Lacan set up an oppositional structure whereby woman is relegated to man. Indeed, woman must recognize man, whereby he gains advantage in the realm of the imaginary (the pre-discursive stage) at her own expense. The oppositional structure precludes the possibility of equality. Cixous and Catherine Clément (1986) powerfully argued:

In the (Hegelian) schema of recognition, there is no place for the other, for an equal other, for a whole and living woman. She must recognize and recuntnize [sic] the male partner, and in the time it takes to do this, she must disappear, leaving him to gain Imaginary profit, to win Imaginary victory. (p. 79)

Hegel, Freud, and Lacan all relied on oppositional pairs to create the subject.

Cixous (1976/2000) drew on the metaphor of the Laughing Medusa to demonstrate the power of a new female subjectivity, one that embraces paradox, contradiction, and the female form, and a rejection of the psychological lack Hegel, Freud, and Lacan attribute to women. Rather than seeing Medusa as a horrifying creature, one that lacks a penis, and the horror that then turns men into stone, Cixous argued women are not castrated, but beautiful. Indeed, Medusa



laughs: “You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (1976/2000, p. 1531). Cixous turned the Freudian notion on its head, replacing the terrifying female genitalia (and lack of penis) of Medusa’s mouth into a mouth filled with language. In this way, Medusa demonstrated “a rejection of male-dominated systems of interpretation that classify female bodies, mouths, and words as inferior” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2000, p. 1522). Abigail Bray (2005) succinctly summarized Cixous’s *écriture féminine* which portrayed the female subject as mattering, rather than lacking:

Her instance that we are never simply lacking, that negativity, death, the Law, phallocentrism, has no final dominion over us . . . is . . . a necessary and strategic recognition that we are capable of changing the way subjectivity is constructed, that we can rewrite the oppressive fictions that imprison us and other and that, moreover, we have an ethical obligation to do so. We do not lack. We matter. (p. 199)

The female subject then refuses to be secondary, to be other, to be lacking in relationship to men.

To accomplish this reimagining of female subjectivity, Cixous argued women need to come to writing and write the feminine body. As women are alienated from their bodies, made to feel ashamed as though they were a dark continent and a man’s other, women must return to becoming embodied beings, and to do so through writing. Writing becomes a way to draw on women’s unconscious as well as to demonstrate the fullness of the female subject. Cixous envisioned her project as a way to counter the lack that Lacan says exists within the symbolic state. Her final parting line in “The Laugh of the Medusa” summarized how her project countered Lacanian psychoanalysis: “In one another we will never be lacking” (p. 1536). Cixous

(1991) further elaborated her position by arguing the female body is a celebration of difference, which fundamentally altered Lacan's notion of woman as lack:

She [the female body] doesn't put herself in the abyss to saturate the feared gapingness; she celebrates her abysses, she wants them wide open, she desires their bottomlessness, their promise: never will you fill us in, you will never lack the good vertigo; for your hunger, our sexes without end, our differences. (p. 43)

By this, she meant that the project of *écriture féminine* recognizes and respects otherness, rather than eliminating it; writing the body rejects lack in favor of joy, love, acceptance, and affirming the other. Susan Sellers (1994) explained how Cixous's re-envisioning the female subject transforms mastery into acceptance of difference, as it "refuses to appropriate or annihilate the other's difference in order to construct the self in a (masculine) position of mastery[;] Cixous suggests that a feminine writing will bring to existence alternative forms of relation, perception and expression" (p. xxix). Simply put: for Cixous, writing is revolutionary.

Similar to Campbell's notion of consciousness raising, Cixous engaged not only the individual writer (or rhetor) to write the body, but called for bringing others into writing: "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing" (1976/2000, p. 1524). Responding to a similar need that prompted Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her* (1989a & 1989b) which recognized the works of early feminist and suffrage activists, Cixous focused on writing as a way to counter the limited amount of texts which highlight female subjectivity. Taking up the question of few female texts explicitly, she and Clément (1986) argued: "Why so few texts? Because there are still so few women winning back their bodies. Woman must write her body, must make up the unimpeded tongue that bursts partitions, classes,

and rhetorics, orders and codes” (pp. 94-5). In this way, writing the body becomes a way to “throw off the constraints, inner and outer” which prevent one from writing (Suleiman, 1991, p. ix), breaking the dichotomies of male/female and subject/object, as well as to demonstrating that women do not have a lack.

These oppositional structures of subjectivity as articulated by Campbell and Cixous exists within much of current feminist theories of the body relative to the fat body, as outlined in Chapter two. As Cecilia Hartley (2001) noted, the fat body “has largely been ignored in feminist studies that attempt to theorize the female body” (p. 61). Much of contemporary understandings of body size and weight exist in a dichotomy of thin versus fat, where fatness becomes important because of a collective fear of fatness (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012b; Saguy, 2012). The fat body becomes erased under such a construction, existing as an abject other. Kathleen LeBesco and Jana Evans Braziel (2001) outlined this position:

Whereas the “thin body” manifests the quintessential commodity in American culture—the pinup beauty marketed in glossy shots, calendar photographs, centerfolds, and advertisements for virtually all products—the “fat body” is the taboo, verboten site around which other commodities proliferate: Slim Fast, Dexatrim, and other appetite-suppressant drugs; . . . fat-substitutes such as Simplese, Avicel, and Olestra; and so on. The fat body is simultaneously produced and abnegated through this very proliferation of commodities: each product alludes to the fat body as the marker of its capitalistic circulation, but also resists and erodes that marked body. (p. 6)

Within cultural and feminist theories, along with dominant discourses of fatness and obesity, the fat body exists as other, related to a lack of thinness, as women have been seen as lacking

relative to men in terms of subjectivity and speaking status. Thus, my work in this dissertation serves as a way to show the fat body in ways that demonstrate “the power of [its] refusal” (Hartley, 2001, p. 71) and look at how a fat alternative subjectivity functions.

I argue Cixous’s use of the feminine form, as exemplified through the Laughing Medusa, and Campbell’s feminine style should be read as operating on a metaphorical, rather than biological, level.<sup>13</sup> These metaphors of feminine subjectivity transformed phallogentric notions of an other who is lacking. The multiple ways in which the *écriture féminine* and feminine style functions defied simple essentializing by arguing that differences matter, and should be embraced.

However, these metaphors focused on written text, of locating and recovering the great speeches of women (Campbell, 1989a, 1989b) and emphasized the permanence of writing (Cixous, 1991, p. 15; 1994, p. xvi). A currently unexplored area to further develop these notions of feminine writing and style includes visual depictions of the body.

Perhaps Cixous and Campbell did not focus on the materiality of the body as it could potentially reify the mind/body split which has alienated women from themselves, whereby the body is seen as an obstacle to rationality (Shildrick & Price, 1999, p. 2). Women have traditionally been associated with the physical body as a way to exclude female subjectivity (see

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<sup>13</sup> I acknowledge that both Campbell and Cixous faced criticism for their theories focus on women/great women of rhetoric as well as essentialized or biological notions of women (see Biesecker, 1992 Ebert, 1996; Jacobus, 1986). Although I agree essentializing a group is problematic, I see both these theories as responding to particular historical moments (see Sellers, 1994, p. 24) as well as applicable beyond women. For example, as Campbell (1989a) herself noted, feminine style “was not, and is not today, a style exclusive to women, either as speakers or as audiences” (p. 12). Dow (1995) agreed, stating feminine style operates as “a strategic approach for some female rhetors, not as an *innate* characteristic” (p. 108). Blankenship and Robson’s (1995) analysis of then President William Clinton’s health care reform rhetoric demonstrated how men can engage in feminine style. Regarding the *écriture féminine*, Cixous recognized that men can participate in writing the body, as she has been influenced by Jean Genêt (1976/2000), Shakespeare, and Kleist (Blyth & Sellers, 2004), all of whom she saw as defying and bucking the phallogentric system. Additionally, she recognized that sex and gender do not always align, as “there are some men who do not repress their femininity, some women who, more or less strongly, inscribe their masculinity. Difference is not distributed, of course, on the basis of socially determined ‘sexes’ ” (Cixous & Clément, 1986, p. 81). My position is that rather than rejecting their theories for essentialism, critics should instead interrogate how alternative expressions of female subjectivity which recognize fullness rather than lack can be empowering.

Kristeva, 1982). Even so, we cannot simply ignore the body but need to analyze the ways in which it can be a productive force. Critics should focus on the body, and how bodily discourse can be a way to enact the Laughing Medusa. We speak our bodies into being and how we understand the materiality of one's bodily form exists within language. Within Cixous's writing, she made overtures towards the material body and its importance, enabling her theory to be extended beyond the confines of the written text. Indeed, Cixous (1988) argued that the body and language operate together: "Language is a translation. It speaks through the body. Each time we translate what we are in the process of thinking, it necessarily passes through our bodies" (pp. 151-2). Thus, it is through the body that woman writes her self. How one experiences the world operates through one's embodied self, the materiality of the body. Although Cixous did not explicitly argue how we, as humans, come to experience truth, her earlier description of language operating through a bodily translation suggests that physical bodies offer an element of discovering the truth. For woman to write her self, she must draw upon a particular frame of reference, which ultimately begins with the embodied or material self. Cixous drew upon metaphors of the body to flesh out her theory. She (1988) explained: "I choose to work on the texts that 'touch' me. I use the word deliberately because I believe there is a bodily relationship between reader and text" (p. 148). Thus, writers (such as Cixous) draw upon their own personal experiences, as well as their own material bodies, to write the body; therefore, the body operates as an important element within *écriture féminine*, and the connections between the two need to be further extended.

As citizenship is embodied and practiced, visual culture comprises a large part of public life and how to understand citizenship. In this way, I build upon the contributions of Campbell

and Cixious as well as Hairman and Lucaites to argue the visuality of the body enables a way subject and citizen, rather than abject and non-citizen. My argument is not that all body or visual rhetoric automatically enacts Cixous's and Campbell's alternatives, as that would fall back into the problematics of biological essentialism and/or biological determinism. Rather than being an automatic or unconscious approach, one can use their body to enact the *écriture féminine*, to demonstrate how the Medusa laughs at social constraints. To enact such metaphorical alternatives there needs to be a disruption of the dominant rhetorics, and most importantly, a disruption that challenges the very notions of such dominance. Moving from these theoretical foundations, the last half of this chapter analyzes the three particular STANDards, arguing the most successful of three analyzed utilized notions of the oxymoronic and Medusa to productively challenge the Strong4Life campaign.

### **“I Stand” Responds to the Strong4Life Campaign**

According to campaign chair and spokesperson Ron Frieson, the first phase of Georgia's Strong4Life (S4L) campaign during the fall of 2011 focused on creating awareness that a problem of children's obesity exists (as cited in Vieira, 2011). Frieson argued that before any solutions could be enacted, the public needed to be persuaded of the seriousness of the problem. Therefore, the S4L campaign utilized a wide variety of media to promote awareness, including billboards, print advertisements, video, television spots, and social media to move people to “stop sugarcoating it,” with “it” being the problem of children's obesity.

The S4L campaign received national media coverage as well as criticism from many fat activists. Many activists viewed the S4L campaign as negative and shaming of fat children and their parents (Campos, 2012; Gray, 2012; I stand against weight bullying, 2012b; Jonassen,

2012a, 2012b). In January 2012, Marilyn Wann developed a fat activism campaign to counter S4L's shaming tactics. In particular, moved by a print ad featuring a young girl with the slogan "It's hard to be a little girl when you're not" (see Figure 12), Wann designed a counter image which she titled a STANDard and argued it created "a powerful image and statement" (DePatie, 2012, para. 7; see also, Margaret, 2012). Wann's STANDard consists of a black and white photograph of Wann in a long sleeved white T-shirt, arms folded across her chest, looking directly at the camera. At the bottom of the image, the slogan reads, "I Stand against harming fat children. Hate ≠ health. Stop weight bigotry. Health At Every Size®." Wann's STANDard



Figure 12: Strong4Life advertisement;  
Image from NPR



Figure 13: Marilyn Wann STANDard;  
Image from I Stand Tumblr

became the first of an entire collection of STANDards, collected and distributed through social

media. Marilyn Wann's particular STANDard deserves critical attention for three reasons:

(1) Wann status as a central figure in the fat activism community; (2) her STANDard functioned as the I Stand social protest template; and (3) the large circulation of her image, likely as a result of the first two reasons.

Marilyn Wann, named the number one fat activist to follow on social media (McCarthy, ca. 2014, para. 3), serves as one of the most well-known and active members in the fat activism and fat studies communities (Rothblum & Solovay, 2009, p. xxvii). She is an author, weight diversity speaker, community member, and fat activist. Her personal writings span over twenty years, including her zine turned into the 1998 book *Fat!so?*, essays published in *Health At Every Size*, popular press pieces for *CNN* and other media outlets, and the introduction to the 2009 *The Fat Studies Reader*, one of the first organized collections of fat studies scholarship (see Wann, 1998, 2004, 2009, 2013). Beyond traditional media, Wann is active on social media, including her personal websites (<http://www.marilynwann.com> and <http://fatso.com>), Tumblr (<http://marilynwann.tumblr.com>), Twitter (<https://twitter.com/MarilynWann>), and Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/marilynwann>). Wann also organized and runs the fat studies list server, which as of August 2012 included 674 members (Saguy, 2013, p. 39). Wann regularly speaks at conferences (such as the 2010 National Communication Association conference and the 2014 Organization for the Study of Communication, Language & Gender conference) and high schools (Schuyler, 2003, para. 36-37). Wann also contributes regularly to the fat acceptance community through service and collective action. She served as board member for the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance from 2004-2008, served as an advisory board member of *Health At Every Size* journal from 2000-2006, and currently sits on the editorial board for the *Fat*



*Studies Journal* (Wann, n.d., para. 4). Wann organized protests against fat-phobic attitudes and policies, including organizing events in San Francisco such as a fat kiss-in and an “eat me” protest to a San Francisco fitness company’s advertisement’s slogan “when the aliens come, they will eat the fat ones first” (Nieves, 2000, para. 5; Saguy, 2013, p. 155). The “eat me” protest helped to spark a larger conversation about weight-based discrimination, and Wann’s efforts, along with other fat activists, led to the successful ban on height and weight discrimination statute in San Francisco (Saguy, 2013, p. 156). Currently only six cities (Binghamton, NY; Madison, WI; San Francisco, CA; Santa Cruz, CA; Urbana, IL; Washington, D.C.) and one state (Michigan) explicitly prohibit weight-based discrimination (NAAFA, 2013, n.p.). All of Wann’s efforts, past and present, place her as a central figure in the fat activism movement.

In many ways, Wann serves as a face for fat activism and the spokesperson for this particular social protest campaign. After her outrage at the S4L ad, she created her own STANDard, inspiring others to follow in the overall project. After developing and distributing her own STANDard, Wann actively recruited additional images through social media. She publicized the I Stand campaign through social media including her personal blog, Twitter, and Facebook account (Wann, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012e, 2012f, & ca. 2012), answered interview questions about the campaign (DePatie, 2012; Margaret, 2012), and created a specific Facebook page dedicated to the campaign (I stand against weight bullying, 2012a, 2012b). To have one’s STANDard published online through the [istandagainstweightbullying](http://istandagainstweightbullying.tumblr.com) Tumblr account, individuals simply needed to “send [their] photo, a brief statement of what [they] ‘stand for’ (or against) and any photo credits or limits to publication to [marilyn@fatso.com](mailto:marilyn@fatso.com)” (New Year’s Revolutions Resources, n.d, n.p). This specific form remained consistent with Wann’s original

composition. Wann’s team assembling the campaign looked for images with the following three criteria—a black and white photo, the words for one’s personalized STANDard, and the stop weight bigotry and Health At Every Size® logo at the bottom; failure to adhere to the criteria meant the STANDard was not published.

Although the content varied, all STANDards fit under the umbrella of countering anti-obesity campaigns, spurred to action by the Georgia campaign. The STANDards responded to the idea that the fat body exists as a problem and/or merits social hatred, as argued in current dominant ideologies of fatness outlined in Chapter one. The campaign took “the approach of the pleasure principle as opposed to the punishment principle” (DePatie, 2012, para. 13). Indeed, the top of each of the 34 webpages of the Tumblr outlined the mission of the Tumblr by stating: “A RESPONSE TO GEORGIA’S MISGUIDED AND HARMFUL STRONG4LIFE CAMPAIGN AGAINST CHILDHOOD OBESITY. FOR MORE, SEE [HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ISTANDAGAINSTWEIGHTBULLING](https://www.facebook.com/istandagainstweightbullying)” (<http://istandagainstweightbullying.tumblr.com>). Such language on the webpage reminded the viewer of the intent of the campaign; coupled with the phrase “Stop weight bigotry” on every STANDard, the collection countered the Georgia campaign’s slogan of “Stop childhood obesity” which appeared on all S4L campaign posters.

During the first few months of 2012, the Tumblr grew to a total of 333 images and other additional images appeared on Facebook and Pinterest which did not appear on Tumblr. Out of all these images, Wann’s STANDard, which appeared as the very first image on the I Stand Tumblr, circulated the most out of all the I Stand images, regardless of place of posting (Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest). As of April 21, 2013, Wann’s STANDard circulated as an original image 59 times (2 on Tumblr; 3 on Facebook; 8 on Pinterest; 42 on various blogs; 4 on

newspaper and newsletters); as a reblog, share, or repin 544 times (418 on Tumblr; 112 on Facebook; 14 on Pinterest); and liked 557 times (376 on Tumblr; 167 Facebook likes; 14 on Pinterest), totaling 1,160 circulated images (see Appendix for breakdown of the various sites and how I conducted the search to arrive at these results). The various social media of Tumblr, Facebook, Pinterest, blogs, and online newsletters along with more traditional media including newspapers, such as *BBC*, *SF Weekly*, and *Large and In Charge*, demonstrated the wide reach of her particular image.

Analyzing Wann's particular image offered key insights into a pro-fat identity and a response to childhood obesity campaigns. Wann's STANDard created a form of resistance through the rhetorical construction of a pro-fat militant mother protecting fat children and/or a fat person speaking back to dominant fat as problem ideologies but ultimately re entrenched fatphobic ideologies by too closely drawing on the mirroring and matching visual style of the S4L campaign advertisement. Overall, the disempowering aspects of the image ultimately overpowered the empowering aspects.

### **Wann's STANDard Failed to Take a Stand**

Marilyn Wann's STANDard featured a black and white photograph of herself with her written stance at the bottom. The photograph dominated the entire image, as the stance appeared at the bottom fourth of the image. In the photograph, Wann appeared in a long sleeved white T-shirt, with her arms crossed at her chest, eyes directly looking into the camera with a smile on her face, against a gray backdrop. The center of the image draws the viewer's eyes to her crossed arms, which stand out not only because of placement in the center of the image but the whiteness of her shirt against the gray background and the lack of direct lighting on Wann's face.

In contrast to the simple black and white photograph, the words of Wann's personal stance stand out. Her stance read: "I stand against harming fat children. Hate ≠ health" with the campaign slogan of "Stop weight bigotry. Health At Every Size®" written underneath. The words "I Stand" and "Stop weight bigotry" appeared in hot pink, and the Health At Every Size® logo appeared in white lettering against a hot pink backdrop. The pink lettering demonstrated Wann taking a stand because it included the only color in the image and with "I Stand" appearing in the largest font, drawing the viewer to the wording. Two positive readings emerged from the image: (1) a pro-fat identity generally, drawing on a body diversity perspective (Saguy, 2013, p. 164) and (2) a militant mother defending children against fat phobia, prejudice, and harm. These readings demonstrated how Wann's STANDard attempted to break the linkage between the good body and good citizen, by redefining both body and citizen: Bodies can be of various sizes as well as individual actions should not be be shame or hate, thus redefining what constitutes a good citizen. In her view, it is not a person's size that makes them a good citizen. Rather, it is a person's actions that makes them a good citizen, including standing as a militant mother to protect children.

### **Pro-Fat Identity**

Against the backdrop of the black and white photograph, the hot pink letters stand out as a primary way to read the image. As a whole, the image functioned as an example of pro-fat discourse, through the visible presence of the fat body in the photograph and the language of the stance. Rather than erasing, hiding, or covering up Wann's fat body, her eyes looked directly at the camera, with a strong expression in her eyes, and at a level angle between Wann and the viewer. Such a direct gaze challenges dominant readings of fat people as less than by

encouraging an oppositional gaze / reading. bell hooks (1992) outlined a theory of oppositional gaze whereby individuals look back at power structures, “as a site of resistance only when individual black women resist the imposition of dominant ways of knowing and looking” (p. 128). Although hooks’s theory focused on race and specifically Black women, her theory can also be applied in other contexts, particularly as hooks focused on representations of disempowerment and empowerment through disruption of images. With the I Stand image, Wann’s gaze and body challenged the dominant readings of fat people as unhealthy, out of control, and unhappy. Her direct gaze and smile invited the reader to view her and her body as powerful and happy. Her direct gaze and smile do not apologize for her body in any way but instead signaled her comfort level with herself.

Wann’s STANDard directly copied the the style and physical positioning of the S4L advertisement; when comparing the images side by side, one can imagine that Wann is the little girl from the Georgia advertisement as an adult. Even viewing Wann’s STANDard by itself, Wann clearly is an adult, demonstrating that she survived childhood and now stands before the viewer as an adult. Therefore, Wann’s physical body also demonstrated the ability of a fat child to grow into adulthood; as a fat adult, her body provided the warrant to the claim that fatness does not mean a death sentence. Her silvery hair denoted age and longevity of life, adding to her body’s argument that fat does not equal health (a credo among the HAES movement; see Bacon, 2010). Her body, as a fat older person, enacted the claim that health can be at any size. Enacting argument claims functions as critical aspect of argument as a whole, for as Randall Lake (1990) argued, “arguments seek assent not only to the claim stated but also to the claims enacted” (p. 83). Within the image, Wann’s body existed as the site of argument (see DeLuca, 1999). In this

sense, her body functioned as an enactment of the pro-fat discourse by demonstrating the presence of her identity and voice through the image.

Her bodily stance worked with the words of her stance as well. As visual scholars note, understanding the verbal-visual relationship in images remains crucial (Benson, 2008, p. 415; Carrier, 2000, p. 74; Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008b, p. 2; Palczewski, 2002, p. 6). Each aspect, verbal as well as visual, implicated the other. The words of Wann's stance demonstrated her affiliation with fat pride as well as the Health At Every Size (HAES) movement in two ways: (1) the words "stop weight bigotry" and HAES logo and (2) the dissociation of weight from health and health campaigns. Both of these verbal elements further demonstrated a pro-fat identity and worked with the visual display of Wann's physical body in the photograph.

First, using the HAES logo indicated an alignment with fat positive identities. Coupled with the standing against weight bigotry, the words directed the viewer to see Wann as part of fat pride. Additionally, Wann's personal status as a long-time outspoken fat activist contributed to this reading, as she frequently promotes HAES events and pro-fat identity (for examples, see Wann, 1998, 2004, 2009, 2013; also <http://fatso.com> and <http://marilynwann.tumblr.com>). The words "stop weight bigotry" also exhorted the viewer to see Wann herself as an activist who works to stop such fat phobic tendencies through her personal stance against harming fat children, as evidenced through the STANDard itself and her body itself.

Second, the specific wording of her individualized STANDard dissociated fatness and/or weight from health. In argumentation theory, dissociation functions as a way to reduce or resolve a tension between two concepts through a process of redefinition or reframing. According to Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyetca (1969), the most common form of dissociation

includes the appearance / reality pairing, where although something appeared to be true or real, it is not. For example, Barbara Warnick (1996) outlined how presidential candidate John F. Kennedy responded to the controversy of running as a Catholic by using argument schemes, including real / apparent, to reframe the controversy on the real issues of the campaign, such as poverty, hunger, and Communism, rather than the apparent issue of his Catholicism. In Wann's STANDard, the sentence "Hate ≠ health" broke the association between the S4L campaign and a health campaign by redefining it as a hate campaign. The does not equal sign visually demonstrated this breakage, challenging the apparent reality that the Georgia campaign benefits individuals' health. In so doing, Wann's STANDard challenged the framing of the S4L campaign.

### **Militant Motherhood**

Moving from the dissociation between health and hate, Wann's STANDard assumed the role of cultural mother through her stance as militant mother for fat children. Mari Boor Tonn (1996) outlined a theory of militant motherhood, where "militant protective love, then, necessarily broadens the maternal 'ethic of care' beyond its genteel moorings to include aggression and occasional bodily risk" (p. 5). Although culturally women may face criticism for being too assertive or aggressive, the role of mother socially sanctions aggressiveness in defense of their children (see also Tonn, 2011). Although Tonn focused on Mary Harris Jones's verbal rhetoric, her theory also applies here to the visual rhetoric of Wann's STANDard.

I argue Wann drew upon the role of militant motherhood through her crossed arms and verbal firm stance against both fat hatred and harm to children. Her crossed arms indicated a level of control, as a way of channelling her emotions with a pro-fat identity through the image of a militant mother. Her crossed arms indicated her firm position; she will not be moved. The

presence of her visibly fat body demonstrated her willingness to take up space and put herself at risk in front of a public audience to protect fat children.

Wann's role as militant mother responded to weight discrimination, that having a fat child reflects negatively on the parental caregiver, frequently the mother (as further developed in Chapter four; see also Boero, 2009). In this way, she existed as a potential mother to all fat children, regardless of her own motherhood status. Within the image, Wann symbolically took the place of mother to fat children, standing up to those who argued fat children are a problem. Her crossed arms functioned as a form of protection for fat children by providing a barrier between fat children and those who would seek to change and/or bully them through hate or weight bigotry. Within the image, the crossed arms served as a line of demarcation between her stance and Children's Health Care of Atlanta. The closed arms signaled both frustration and protection-frustration at the harming of fat children and protection of those children from fat hatred and weight bigotry. In the role of militant mother, Wann showcased a different aspect of parental caregiving; the form of protection she offered against fat shaming, harming, and weight bigotry showcased the elements of a strong parent. Thus, to parent a fat child well required such protection rather than Georgia's S4L campaign which argued the presence of a fat child indicates a bad parent.

Not only did her body exist as a buffer, wedging it between fat haters and Children's Health Care of Atlanta, but the words of Wann's stance contributed to her status as a militant mother. The words "Hate ≠ health" functioned within the context of other sentences; hate here became defined as harming fat children through weight bigotry. As the S4L campaign argued childhood obesity exists as a health problem due to children's weight, Wann's STANDard



directly opposed that ideology by arguing such attitudes harm children through hate, implying that what may seem as good intentions actually existed as hateful.

However, the power of this STANDard depended upon an enthymeme; a viewer needed to understand the broader social context of the Georgia S4L campaign or fatness social ideologies to complete the overall argument. The viewer must connect the framing at the top of each Tumblr webpage to the image; although listed on the Tumblr site, subsequent circulations of the image did not always include the context of the S4L campaign and presumed the viewer's familiarity with Marilyn Wann, the controversy surrounding the campaign, and/or fat pride. The stance "I stand against harming fat children" is not, on its face, controversial. Almost no one would argue for harming any child, regardless of size. Thus, the STANDard did not adequately address the agent which causes harm. Even with the second sentence of "hate ≠ health," hate and health cannot act by themselves as agents, so it again became difficult to locate which party or parties Wann and her STANDard held as responsible for harming fat children. Without knowing the responsible party, it became difficult to take action against the particular party, parties, and/or the Georgia S4L campaign.

Part of the enthymematic problem with reading Wann's STANDard stemmed from the fact that her image almost directly mirrors and matches a S4L print advertisement (Figure 14). As previously noted, Wann decided to begin the I Stand campaign after viewing the S4L advertisement. In an interview reflecting on her creative choices in her own STANDard, she stated:

I was very angry when I saw one particular image used in the Georgia hate campaign . . .  
It shows a fat girl (an actor!) in a striped shirt, with this slogan over her belly: "It's hard

to be a little girl when you're not." This is not a health message, it's a hate message. I decided to put a photo of me in the place of that girl, with a slogan that tells children of all sizes I'll stand up to their bullies, even if it's a big hospital system (or the first lady) who does it. My credo: "I stand against harming fat children. Hate ≠ health." I want to show the world that it's not okay to shame fat children or to give them dangerous, discriminatory health advice. (as cited in Margaret, 2012, para. 2)

Thus, Wann herself presumed the viewer's familiarity not only with the S4L campaign but a particular advertisement. Her drawing on the verbal and visual dimensions of the S4L advertisement through a mirror and match strategy undercut the power established by the militant motherhood identity.

Additionally, Wann's redefinition of citizenship based upon actions failed because she did not articulate a positive identity or stance. For as Lakoff (2004) argued, one cannot fight a frame within the frame, but must redirect it through a different or alternative frame. This next section outlined the theory of mirror and match strategy, connected it with visual circulation of images, and posed questions regarding the visual strategy of mirror and match for social controversies and advocacy.

### **Mirror and Match Failure**

Jonathan Lange (1993) examined a "logic of interaction" between two opposing sides of the social controversy by using the case study of conflict in the Pacific Northwest between pro-logging timber companies and environmental groups pro-conservation for old growth forests and the spotted owl. He argued information campaigns rely on mirroring and matching strategies to get their message across to a larger audience and presumes the audience has prior knowledge of

the other campaign. Mirroring refers to “communication behavior that duplicates the other party’s tactic by presenting antithetical, polar or ‘mirror image’ information” whereas matching refers to “communication behavior that copies or repeats the other party’s strategy” (p. 245). Although his theory dealt with textual based discourses, I argue scholars should expand his theory to examine visual rhetoric as well. Many social and health campaigns include or center around visual images, including photographs, posters, billboards, and/or video. Both the S4L and I Stand campaigns relied heavily upon visual aspects to convey their messages, and analyzing the logic of interaction between Wann’s STANDard and the S4L’s advertisement offered insights into how mirror and matching operated visually.

Additionally, Lange’s theory of mirroring complements Lester Olson’s (2009) theory of rhetorical re-circulation of images, whereby visual compositions “[pattern] deliberately after an earlier, almost identical composition” (p. 3), frequently in a series of multiple re-iterations to create similar arguments. The strategy of re-circulation draws upon an original work and remakes it to create “an almost identical composition’s subsequent persuasive uses” (p. 3). Drawing upon re-circulations of “The Able Doctor,” Olson examined how the similar patterns of the drawings all exist as criticisms of the British reaction to the Boston Tea Party, although tailored differently for British or British American colonies. Although I argue Wann’s STANDard did not exist as a re-circulation of the S4L image due to its persuasive message being the opposite of the S4L campaign, Olson’s theory demonstrated the ability to expand Lange’s textually based theory to include visual representations. However, Olson’s theory examined only one side of a social controversy and ignored the relationship between two opposing sides. Scholars should examine mirror and matching strategies along with circulation as a visual

rhetorical theory to showcase how campaigns speak to each other visually to develop their side of a social controversy.

In this case study, the mirror and matching strategy undercut the transformative potential of the fat-positive militant mother in Wann's STANDard. Through such a close mirroring and matching, Wann used the same framing as the S4L campaign, that of health, rather than reframing the issue in a different frame. Negating a frame actually evokes the same frame: "When you are arguing the other side: Do not use their language. Their language picks out a frame—and it won't be the frame you want" (Lakoff, 2004, p. 3). Although Lakoff here referred to texts and verbal communication, I argue it reflects visual as well as verbal frames, given that repetitive visual forms evoke particular meanings and understandings (Edwards & Winkler, 1997/2008).

Extending on ideas similar to mirroring, matching, and framing, Helen Shugart (1997) argued reflecting back as a form of appropriation or criticism can be limited; "reflection, by definition, fixed on its focus and thus defined, in large part, by its nemesis" (p. 219). Although Shugart concluded reflection can be an effective form of resistance, which I also agree, in this case, the STANDard not only reflected or mirrored but also matched, diminishing its ability to redefine understandings of fatness. It used too many of the same visual meanings and failed to challenge, recontextualize, or reappropriate such terms. This next section analyzed how the STANDard mirrored and matched the S4L advertisement.

The anti-childhood obesity S4L advertisement featured a young White girl in a striped T-shirt, arms crossed over her chest, looking sadly at the camera with a frown on her face. Underneath her folded arms, the following slogan appeared: "Warning. It's hard to be a little girl

when you're not. Stop childhood obesity. strong4life.com." The word "warning" appeared in red capital letters and "strong4life.com" in white letters against a red background to draw attention to the public health campaign.

Wann's STANDard almost directly mirrored the S4L advertisement: She appeared in a long sleeved T-shirt, arms crossed at the chest, with her slogan appearing in a similar style and layout format. The key differences between S4L and Wann included a smile rather than a frown, hot pink lettering rather than red, and the verbal content of the message. However, by drawing so closely on the original advertisement, Wann's STANDard replicated some of the fat as a problem discourses and failed to adequately recontextualize the issue. When first viewing the STANDard, the viewer is drawn to Wann's crossed arms over her chest in the center of the image; her crossed arms encased in the white T-shirt stand out against the gray backdrop. Her crossed arms can be read as Wann being closed off or attempting to physically take up less space and cover up or hide her body; rather than being body and fat positive, these readings filtered back into dominant ideologies that fat is a problem and thus fat people are too.

Additionally, crossing her arms over her chest drew the eye to her midsection and the largeness of her stomach. As Susan Bordo (2003) argued, images of stomachs with "unwanted bulges and erupting stomachs [serve] . . . as a metaphor of anxiety about internal processes out of control—uncontained desires, unrestrained hunger, uncontrolled impulse" (p. 189). Some of the reasoning for the stomach crystalizing the fears about fat bodies stems from the fact that the stomach serves as the "symbol of consumption" (Bordo, 2003, p. 202), the ultimate evidence that one's out of control behavior regarding food became manifest physically. Given this cultural

anxiety about fatness and fat stomachs in particular, having the image centered on Wann's mid-section reinforced fat-phobic ideas.

Part of the reason for the eye's focus on Wann's stomach area stemmed from the poor lighting which shadowed her face. Given the bright white of the T-shirt against the gray background, Wann's face became lost in the overall image, separating her head from her body, providing primacy to the body itself. This image continued a trend which Deborah Thomson (2007) called "spectacular decapitation," in which "the shamed, anonymous fat body whose head has been removed to protect the identity of the unwilling, captured, faceless individual" (p. 2). Although not an actual decapitation, I argue Wann's STANdard functions similarly; her fat body is the center of the image and photo, and her poorly lit head made her appear almost faceless. Without a sense of her face, it becomes difficult to view Wann as a speaking subject, as fat-phobic ideologies cast those seen as overweight and obese within uninhabitable speaking positions (Butler, 1993, 2004). The viewer must work hard to see Wann's facial expression and eyes; instead, her closed off fat body overwhelmed the limits of the image, in terms of goal and the visuals.

Wann's clothing also hurt her message. Her T-shirt looked unkempt, misfitting and shapeless as evidenced by the lack of clear shoulder definition, possibly overstretched around the neck, and the numerous wrinkles over her arms, chest, and belly. The T-shirt existed untucked into any form of pants or skirt, creating a sense of shapelessness. Rather than accenting her body, the T-shirt hid her body and her folded arms attempted to visually squeeze herself into a smaller shape. The ill fitting shirt along with its wrinkles fed into discourses of fat people as lazy and unkempt; the T-shirt provided that evidence. In contrast to the S4L girl's T-shirt which looks well

cared for with the only wrinkles being from being pulled too tightly against the skin of the girl's arms, Wann's ill fitting T-shirt looked as though she let herself go, forgoing caring about appearances, which again fit within dominant ideologies of fatness being lacking the will power over food and thus lacking control over one's appearance. Additional evidence of letting herself go included the dull and greasy look to her hair along with her large double chin. Marilyn Wann did directly address the camera, and thus the viewer, through her gaze and her smile but the shadows around her face and eyes made it difficult to focus on those aspects and the defensive nature of her body with the crossed arms overpowers a fat-positive reading.

The verbal aspect of the STANDard, although a direct counter to the S4L slogan, failed to recontextualize or reframe dominant fat narratives. In response to it being hard to be a little girl when one's not, standing against fat hatred makes sense. However, Wann's slogan still failed to articulate what she does stand for; simply countering a negative, in this case harm and hatred, did not then reframe the obesity as a health and social problem discourse. As George Lakoff (2004) argued, facts themselves are not enough; facts must exist within a larger frame of understanding, within currently accepted values (pp. 109-110). Lakoff succinctly argued: "If the facts do not fit a frame, the frame stays and the facts bounce off" (p. 17). As discussed previously, the dominant framing of fat bodies views fatness as a problem needing to be solved. Without offering an alternative verbal framing to go along with her militant bodily stance, the dominant framing and reading of fat bodies as a problem limited the scope and potential of Wann's argument.

Further, by disassociating hatred and health, the STANDard attempted to show how S4L is a hate campaign rather than a health campaign. However, such a reading only came into play by reading such images against one another. Wann's STANDard failed to recontextualize her

own image as a form of health, instead using same framing of health as Strong4Life. For rhetorics of fatness in particular, using a medical model typically reinforces fatphobic ideologies: “challenges to obesity discourse that adopt a medical framework have the contrary effect of reinforcing medical control of fat identity” (Whitley-Putz, 2004, p. 128). The Health At Every Size® logo could be read as an way to showcase health in a different way, but the visualization of Wann’s body, emphasis on her stomach area, the closed arms, sloppiness of her dress and hair fail to read “health.” The oppositional form of negation did not create a positive; with no grounded alternative to replace fat hatred, the dominant framing of fat as a health and social problem remained.

A more powerful argument would be to be playful with images and embrace one’s body, wearing form fitting clothes, acting playful, and in a bodily open position. As Catherine Palczewski (2002) noted, a direct countering or response is not the only available strategy; “responding to an argument on its own terms is not the only way to play the game” (p. 4). Focusing on the visual rhetoric of the Guerrilla Girls, Anne Demo (2000) argued other strategies of political resistance include poking fun through mimicry and exaggeration. By responding to S4L’s advertisement on its own terms, using mirroring and matching, and working within the framework of health, Marilyn Wann failed to fully redefine and rearticulate fat identity and her STANDard failed to stand for the justice of others.

### **Standing or Sitting for Justice: Countering the Dominant Narrative**

However, two examples of STANDards which playfully mimicked and/or repositioned the subjectivity of the fat body include (1) the militant mother standing between children and cowardly bullies and (2) the sitting mother who sits, rather than stands, for justice (see Figures



14 and 15, respectively). Although neither of these STANDards were very widely circulated, both offer an important counterpoint to both the S4L original advertisement and Wann's



Figure 14: Cowardly Bullies STANDARD;  
Image from I Stand Tumblr



Figure 15: Sitting Mother STANDARD;  
Image from Facebook & Pinterest

STANDARD. Existing on the public screen countered the dominant viewpoint of fatness as an unlivable, uninhabitable position, for as Judith Butler (2004) argued, what appears and circulates within public spaces matters:

The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not.

It is also a way of establishing whose lives can be marked as lives. (pp. xx-xxl)

These two STANDards refused the dominant understandings of fatness meaning out of control, unlivable, and uninhabitable. Both marked their lives as lives, calling for attention to new ways of seeing fat bodies. They demonstrated an alternative view of bodily citizenship, whereby the fat body functioned as playful, powerful, active, and strong.

### **Fat, Fabulous Mother Figure**

The cowardly bullies STANDard (Figure 14) featured fat woman Mara Nesbitt-Aldrich in a leopard print coat, gloves, and hat. Her hands were up by her shoulders, with palms out. The framing of the photograph places her large body and hands between herself and two groups. The words of her STANDard emphasized this position: “I stand between children and the cowards who bully them.” With her raised arms, her large body served as a blockade between children and bullies, in this case likely referring to Children’s Health Care of Atlanta and the S4L campaign, but also expanding out to all varieties of bullies. Rather than folding in on herself, as Wann and the Georgia girl both did, Nesbitt-Aldrich took up space, arms out, as a way to demonstrate her importance: “Women are developing ways of standing up—with their bodies, if need be—for their rights. It isn’t brawn that allows them to do that, but something far more important: a psychological stamina that comes from *physical self-esteem*” (Dowling, 2000, p. xxvii). Her hands marked her as assertive, not passive: These hands showed her an agent of action, and one who was comfortable in her own skin.

Nesbitt-Aldrich also functioned as a militant mother figure, but included significant differences from Wann’s image. In this image, the words of the STANDard promoted identification: anyone would want to stand between children and cowardly bullies; anyone would understand a mother acting brazenly to protect her child(ren) from harm. The STANDard utilized

a rhetoric of display, which helped make “manifest possible relationships with audiences” which in this case opened a sense of “community through identification, estrangement, or some intermediate inclination” (Prelli, 2006, pp. 21-22). One way this STANDard promoted identification was through the use of term “bully.” Although types of bullying vary, audiences could relate to the idea that bullies commit such actions due to their cowardice. Also, as attention to bullying, particularly of children, has increased in the last few years in the U.S., more people are aware of the problems of bullying and more likely to take action. Indeed, someone who views this STANDard may have been bullied themselves as a child, and thus connect with Nesbitt-Aldrich’s action as a militant mother standing up for children. This position as mother stemmed from a position of strength: she looked as though she was stepping into and breaking up a fight, willing to put her own body on the line to protect her children. Additionally, her body at risk emphasized the positive statement of her STANDard; within the image, Nesbitt-Aldrich’s body takes a literal stand and the accompany text did as well.

This position of strength also stemmed from her playful look and dress to emphasize the positive affirmation statement of the STANDard. Nesbitt-Aldrich’s clothing fit her body with no pulls, stretches, or pinched fabric. Her coat is in fashionable, stylish, and the leopard print emphasized her body confidence. The matching accessories of black gloves and hat again demonstrated a close attention to detail and knowledge of how to dress one’s body to advantage, showcasing a fat woman in position of power, strength, and beauty, rather than out of control and/or slovenly. She demanded attention from the viewer through her choice of bold print and direct gaze towards the camera. Although this image also centered on Nesbitt-Aldrich’s stomach, the viewer’s gaze is not directed towards her mid-section. Rather, the gaze focuses on her face

and hands, imagining what her hands signify and then connecting the outstretched hands with the words of her STANDard to symbolically place her between bullies and innocent children. Here the words reframed the Georgia campaign as bullying and a cowardly move by adults towards children, necessitating an intervention. As a fat fabulous woman, Nesbitt-Aldrich and her STANDard utilized the oppositional gaze (hooks, 1992), marking her life and the lives of fat children as important, worthy, and livable.

### **Sitting for Justice**

The sitting mother STANDard (Figure 15) featured model Saucye West of Full Figure Entertainment. This STANDard featured significant differences between Wann and Nesbitt-Aldrich's STANDards, as well as many of the STANDards in the I Stand collection. First, this standard included an image credit, identifying the subject, photographer, and reason the picture was taken: "FFE Model Saucye West. Photographed by Desmond Rogers photography for Full Figure Entertainment." Second, this STANDard was one of the few to feature a Black woman. Although in the Tumblr some STANDards included a few Black women and men, the overwhelming majority of subjects were White, which led to the critique by NOLOSE (National Organization for Lesbians of Size) that the campaign failed to integrate class or racial critiques of the Georgia campaign and fatphobic discourses more generally (see NOLOSE, ca. 2012). With a smaller sample size on Facebook (only 21 posted STANDards), West's STANDard was one of two STANDards featuring a Black woman, highlighting its significance. Additionally, Marilyn Wann (2012d) herself posted this STANDard to the Facebook page, increasing its visibility. Finally, West's STANDard was one of the few which used a different beginning to the STANDard statement; in this case, she declared "I sit." The overwhelming majority of all the

STANDards used the formula of “I stand,” or a variation of standing such as “we stand” or “come stand” and then statement of what one stands for or against. On the Tumblr, 287 STANDards began with “I stand” (86%), 43 began “we stand” (13%), and one began “come stand: (0.003%). Two STANDards did not use the word “stand” and instead stated “I roll,” one of which included the only solo depicted, live animal (rather than a stuffed animal) on a STANDard. Between the 354 STANDards posted on Tumblr and Facebook, West’s STANDard was the only image to use the phrase “I sit” as the beginning statement. West’s STANDard highlighted ideas and critiques which were not present in majority of this campaign; thus, although her STANDard was not highly circulated, it offered an important look into an alternative framing and direction the campaign could have taken.

Using an image credit for both the model as well as photographer offered a way for the viewer to connect more readily with the image. Names function as important identifiers for self-identity and promotes identification with others. Although those familiar with Wann and/or Nesbitt-Aldrich likely will recognize them in the photographs, the responsibility for knowing who were the women in the STANDard fell onto the viewer. West’s STANDard identified her specifically. Providing her name offered an important function: it allowed the viewer to connect with her as a specific person, as Saucye West, rather than as a nameless person. This form of connection helped enable alternative readings of the fat body, in several ways: as a mother advocating for children; as one sitting for civil rights and justice; and most significantly, as a Laughing Medusa embracing her fat body. Each reading is examined in turn to flesh out how West’s STANDard served as an important critique to the specific Georgia campaign and fatphobic rhetorics more generally.

**Mother advocate frame.** West's STANDard placed her as a mother figure who advocates for children, although not a militant mother as outlined by Tonn (1996) or within Wann's and Nesbitt-Aldrich's images. Regardless of her own pregnancy status, which functioned opaquely within the photograph, the words of her image placed her in the cultural role of mother and within the tradition of Black othermothers as social activists specifically (Edwards, 2004). Her STANDard stated: "I sit for plus sized pregnant women who might be too tired to stand right now but who are still healthy and strong and delivering healthy and strong babies!" Connecting her advocacy to motherhood enabled West to productively critique others' ideas, for as Andrea O'Reilly (2010) discussed, maternal activism enables social commentary: "Mothers, by way of maternal activism, use their position as mothers to lobby for social and political change. . . . motherwork is redefined as a social and political act through which social change is made possible (p. 371). Good mothers and othermothers focus on raising children, their own and others, in ways which affirm and protect children, and West's STANDard showcased her commitment to such a position. Drawing on the idea that as a society, motherhood should be used to protect children, including those unborn, enabled West to advocate in a different way than the role of militant mother demonstrated through Wann's and Nesbitt-Aldrich's STANDards.

More specifically, the words of the STANDard allowed for a reevaluation of West's body, and her stomach in particular. Reading her stomach as a pregnant belly rather than a fat one enabled a more positive reading, as it is more socially acceptable for women to gain weight for the health of the child. Connecting West's own body to mothers of children also enabled a productive social critique, as she connected a mother's body, and thus body of knowledge, to the

health of babies, drawing on maternal responsibility to make her argument. Marilyn Wann (2012d) contributed to this reading with her commentary about the STANDard when she posted the image to Facebook with this commentary: “Here’s a thoroughly fabulous STANDard from someone who will be an excellent parent.” Viewing the STANDard on Facebook provided this additional framing from Wann, making the viewer reevaluate the role of mother. West countered the narrative of bad mothers failing to protect children from harm (Ladd-Taylor & Umansky, 1998, p. 3) by arguing delivering healthy and strong babies, no matter the size of the mother, functioned as good mothering and as protection from harm. Thus, from West’s standpoint, one’s motherhood status does not depend upon weight but the actions of that mother. As a mother figure, enacting good citizenship here entailed the deeds and specific activities a caretaker does, rather than the size of the one who acts.

**Civil rights frame.** Building on the idea of mother as advocate, West also connected her STANDard to civil rights discourse and again civic action. The framing of the STANDard as “I sit” utilized a different framing than morality or health (two of the dominant fat-phobic framings) by instead activating a civil rights framing, one of the less utilized framings of fat activism (Saguy, 2013). Sitting for justice drew upon connotations of the 1960s civil rights movements doing sit-ins as social protest. Sitting for mothers enabled West to draw on this lineage and connected the 1960s struggle of civil rights with the current civil rights for fat individuals and mothers, enhanced by the fact that West herself is a Black woman. Within this frame, Health At Every Size® indicated connection to the larger social movement by drawing explicitly on the language of fat activism. Here West’s body and ideological stance sat in solidarity with the ideals of fat activism, providing a face for those ideals.

**Laughing Medusa frame.** Most significantly, West's over the shoulder glance and lack of direct gaze at the camera and audience enabled a reading of self-assurance and turning fatness from horrific and monstrous to powerful and fabulous through the figure of the Laughing Medusa (Cixous, 1976/2000). The lack of direct gaze signaled she did not need confirmation of her subjectivity or status by the viewer; West can look at herself and know her own worth. Her coy facial expression then signaled her self-acceptance and fabulousness. In this way, West reconfigured the relationship between viewer and herself, as she does not look for recognition of her subjectivity but showcased it through the image.

West's STANDard enacted the Laughing Medusa by using her body to laugh at the constraints and limitations of dominant rhetorics of fatness and obesity. She embodied confidence in herself by the fact that she sits instead of stands. Rather than playing into the dominant ideas by matching and mirroring the rhetoric of anti-obesity campaigns, West sat calmly and assuredly. Her coy, off to the side look emphasized a reading of her outside the fat = bad and thin = good paradigm. She acknowledged herself rather than waiting for society's acknowledgement, disrupting the power of dominant framings by laughing at the very constraints which attempted to limit her power.

One way she laughed at such constraints was through her actions of modeling, and the image credit of her as a FFE model. Models are generally known for their looks, and thus, highlighting the fact that she worked as a model, and specifically posed for this picture, emphasized her refusal to accept fatness as monstrous and ugly. Instead, naming West as a model also highlighted with the professional look and feel of the photograph within the image. West looked dolled up, which included hair straightened, curled, and styled, natural looking makeup,



eyelashes curled (and possibly accentuated with extensions), lipstick, and a stylish sleeveless dress with a plunging v neckline to show off her body. These specific choices emphasized her femininity, attractiveness, and sexuality. Looking highly feminine fit within gendered attractiveness norms, the idea being that “heteronormative physical appearance that is seen as pleasing, beautiful, and having sexual appeal” (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2014, pp. 82-83). Although merely being fat violates many gendered attractiveness norms, West’s physical appearance and conforming to gendered expectations of dress, makeup, and sexual appeal enabled a reading of her fat body as beautiful.

Part of this reading of her as a powerful and beautiful woman stemmed from the positioning of West’s body and the implied gaze the reader should evaluate her body within the photograph. Her body was posed in a way to accentuate and encourage looking at her body. Rather than standing, facing directly towards the camera, and looking directly at the camera as both Wann and Nesbitt-Aldrich did, West’s body was seated, slightly tilted towards the viewer, and eyes looking off camera, in a coy or sassy way. Sitting offered a less threatening way to confront the viewer and drawing the eye to West’s breasts in the plunging neckline and her body positioning encourages a reading through the male gaze.

Although the male gaze oftentimes is critiqued for being restrictive and objectifying women (Mulvey, 1975; see also DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2014), I argue that in this case it offered a powerful form of identification. Fat people are not typically seen as sexy (Asbill, 2009; Blank, 2011; Weinstein, 2012), so encouraging this way of reading challenges part of the dominant structure. Feuer (1999) summarized this argument: “it is only by approximating other norms of beauty culture and thus evoking a male gaze that fat women today can gain access to

representation in a form that does not code them as repellant” (p. 184). Reading West as an attractive and sexy offers a positive break from the fat bodies existing as problem rhetorics. West’s full name of “Saucye West” emphasized this reading, through seeing her as saucy, full of life, energy, and passion. Additionally, this reading operated consistently with how West branded herself. West’s blogger profile (ca. 2014) identified herself as a “Plus Size Sex Symbol (Self-proclaimed)” as well as a “Ambassador for the plus size community” with goals of “teach[ing] confidence, self love and deservability [sic]” (n.p.). The coy-to-the-side look and bodily positioning demonstrated her laugh at those reading her size as a problem and also enacted her self-pleasure of her body, clothing, and understandings of how to be strong woman and strong mother. Within the image, West provoked a reading of visual pleasure through attractiveness norms but also emphasized self-pleasure, through confidence in herself. This reading functioned differently than both Wann and Nesbitt-Aldrich’s STANDards, as those images both invited and wanted recognition as subjects, through direct confrontation and gaze. West’s to the side glance enacted the Laughing Medusa, who already recognized her subject status and laughed at those who failed to recognize it. Additionally, through the use of sitting and traditional beauty norms, West invited more identification towards her image, which also unsettled more possibilities than a direct mirror/match and/or direct gaze from the other two STANDards.

### **Conclusions**

The I Stand campaign utilized visuals to display and bring forth images of actual fat individuals in an attempt to redefine meanings of fatness and the state of Georgia’s anti-childhood obesity campaign. Through coordinated efforts of Marilyn Wann, I Stand successfully used the public screen to disseminate their message. All three chosen STANDards drew upon

cultural ideals of motherhood to critique the Strong4Life campaign and advocate for citizenship based upon actions than simple body size.

However, all the participants in the I Stand campaign, and the three women highlighted in this chapter, are not well particularly known, particularly as compared to Michelle Obama as the First Lady. As FLOTUS, Obama's *Let's Move!* campaign contained more cultural weight than I Stand. Thus, the images and written slogans of I Stand required more work to offer an alternative viewing than the dominant status quo.

Unfortunately, the close mirror and matching of the structure of the STANDards constrained the power of a redefined subjectivity. Both the Georgia and fat activist campaigns drew on, or responded to, the overarching idea that fatness is the problem. The STANDards' possibilities for redefinition and change of perspective depended upon the viewing audience. When attempting to redefine and break the connection between good citizen as good, thin, body, framing within an alternative health perspective not does not successfully challenge the connection. As all the STANDards included the the HAES logo, this health framework existed within every image, even if the specific words of the STANDard did not. More specifically, the images of Marilyn Wann and Mara Nesbitt-Aldrich still activated the dominant framing of fatness and obesity as a problem through their image and/or written standards. Standing against harming fat children and standing between children and cowardly bullies still activated a framing of fatness being linked to health and/or failed to reframe such identifications. Using a health framework constituted a failed case for change, and revealed the power of the concept that thin means good and healthy, as well as appropriate public citizen.

Without challenging such dominant discourses, the I Stand campaign would fail; a militant mother would still be coded as a bad mother if a viewer accepts the argument that being fat existed as unhealthy and disempowering. The repetitive form of the visuals between the two campaigns located the grounds for argument on the idea that fatness is a public health problem primarily, with cultural ideals of good motherhood as secondary.

Rather than primarily emphasizing the cultural ideal of motherhood to critique public health campaigns on childhood obesity, fat activists should embrace more of West's embodied resistance through the process of the *écriture féminine* and laugh as the Medusa does: Her body stood as evidence of acceptance of her body and laughed at the notion there could be another way to view her body, her mothering, or her civic status. In the world of individualized citizenship through good bodies, one needs to begin with the self and redefine her (and his) relationship to own body. Radically accepting one's own body, through love and self-pleasure, and then demonstrating that bodily enactment to others, will create a break between ideas of "good" and "bad" bodies, through an enactment that anybody and any body can enact citizenship.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation argued the way citizenship in the United States is culturally understood depends upon an embodied notion, where a good citizen becomes defined as having a good, thin body. I argue bodies and debates about bodies are key to understanding public discourse and what individuals in society should do. In the U.S., bodies are the enactment of our citizenship and our civic responsibility. However, as certain bodies are privileged more than others, it becomes more difficult for bodies outside the thin ideal to be read as good citizens.

Each of the three case studies in this dissertation demonstrated how the fat body operated as an important way to display, enact, defend, or alter citizenship status. Rhetorics of fatness and obesity work to conceal the effort that goes into maintaining and perpetuating ideologies of race, class, gender, and motherhood, as well as the embodied aspect of those identities writ onto individuals. Each case study offered a different way to look at the body: Obama's body represented both good and bad citizenship and advocacy; the Strong4Life campaign used fat bodies to represent bad mothers and failed citizens; and finally, fat activists used fat bodies to break the linkage between bodies and appropriate citizenship. However, Michelle Obama with *Let's Move!* and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Inc. with Strong4Life each viewed the body as malleable, changeable and in need of fixing. Contrastingly, fat activism and the I Stand Against Weight Bullying campaign argued for body acceptance, body diversity, and refusing to look at one's body as a project.

Rhetoric used to describe actions of citizenship naturalizes the seemingly inherent characteristics of "good citizen," and by extension, "bad citizen." Returning to the Halloween

story from Chapter one, individuals feel compelled to act upon the perceived problem of others' bodies. Here, the individual body becomes more than an individual, but one that invites, and indeed needs, criticism and regulation to become a good body. Guthman (2009) noted, “the neoliberal subject is compelled to participate in society as both an enthusiastic consumer and as a self-controlled subject” (p. 193). Individuals then need to consume appropriately, to demonstrate control in the means of consumption.

For those who argue the U.S. needs to take action on the problem of overweight and obese bodies, they view the body as a malleable process and easily open to change, through willpower, control, diet, and exercise, as a matter of choice. Such a view excludes societal and individual factors regarding people's size, such as access to fresh foods and vegetables, the ability to pay for more nutrient dense food, the ability to pay for an exercise program and/or trainer, poverty, genetics, and various cultural or individual understandings of beautiful body size. For those who reject others' control of their body and refuse to apologize for one's size, they reject a view of the body as a process, of looking for a better body in the future. Instead, fat activists and HAES advocates argue for viewing the body in the current moment, rather than an aspirational future body, and also argue for acceptance and love for all body types. This viewpoint attempts to disrupt notions of appropriate bodily consumption from citizenship, rather than uncoupling bodily consumption from citizenship entirely.

Additionally, the institution of motherhood functions as an important way women become evaluated as public citizens. For women citizenship is still evaluated through mothering, and the embodied nature of mothering, including how a mother and her children physically look. Culturally, the good body of a child reflects understandings of good and appropriate mothers as

well as the nation. The embodied nature of motherhood and citizenship can be extended into other contexts, particularly when framed as issues of public health. Examples include: debates over vaccinating children and pregnant mothers using drugs, alcohol, or exposing fetus to toxic environment. In these two examples, the choices that individual mothers make become situated within a larger social context and thus the mothers are judged based upon their choices.

Individuals mothers do have choices, but if their choices do not fit within larger culturally understand context of good mothering, they face penalties.

Therefore, my work fits within larger conversations regarding bodies and how bodies come to matter. Bodily rhetorics of choice, transition, and product assume the individual is an agent of action, free and unencumbered to make any number of possible choices. From this perspective, increasing awareness of what constitutes good choices should then automatically lead to better choices. As citizenship is individualized and embodied, social movements and media campaigns now frequently use visuals that offer individuals a way to connect with or reimagine themselves within the goal of that particular movement or campaign. A few recent examples include:

- Project Breastfeeding, which attempts to normalize breastfeeding with pictures of mothers feeding their children without shame, without covering the child with a blanket;
- Operation Beautiful, which uses Post-Its, either physically stuck to mirrors in public bathrooms or posted electronically through social media, to tell individuals they are indeed beautiful, with the goal of having individuals see themselves *as* beautiful;

- #NoMakeupSelfie, a hashtag which indicates users rejected the use of makeup, and possibly Photoshop, with the goal of seeing everyone as naturally beautiful;
- #cockinasock, a hashtag which users place on photographs of men with a sock covering their penis, with the goal of increasing awareness of male cancers.

All of these examples focus on the body, even if they are not specifically about bodily consumption. Bodies then become a way to trigger awareness and the presumption is that awareness then leads to an appropriate, proper civic response.

What these campaigns have in common with the case studies in this dissertation is that they all focus on the individual as the primary locus of change. In many ways, these campaigns utilize the language of agency, empowerment, and choice but focus solely on individualistic solutions. Writing about the co-optation of feminist discourses in popular culture and public discourse, Angela McRobbie (2009) stated: “elements of feminism have been taken into account and have absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life. Drawing on vocabulary that includes words like ‘empowerment’ and ‘choice,’ these elements are then converted into a much more individualistic discourse” (p. 1). Robbie continued, arguing that individuals then become judged for being “the kind of subject who can make the right choices” (p. 19). These choices entail inhabiting a certain kind of body, consuming in certain ways, and other forms of individualized actions.

As citizenship shifted to an emphasis on the individual, the proper response can simply be awareness, creating a positive feedback loop, where individuals can post on social media or talk about an issue, feel good about themselves, and believe they made a difference. Although it is true that awareness is an important aspect of social movements (see Campbell, 1973),



awareness by itself will not change structural, institutional aspects of social problems. For example, a picture of a mother breastfeeding her child will not create legislation that protects breastfeeding mothers in public. Thinking oneself is beautiful (either through Post It or no makeup) will not necessarily change beauty norms one sees in magazines and other form of media. Tweeting a picture of an almost nude man with a sock over his penis does not contribute to funding for cancer research, nor does it encourage regular health checkups for certain cancers, such as prostate or colon cancer.

Focusing on bodily consumptive citizenship can negatively impact advocacy as well, by imposing serious limitations. First, it limits the possible arguments to be used. It can be more difficult to find common ground if we all “should” be doing a particular kind of body. From the standpoint of bodily citizenship, the goal shifts from unifying individuals over a common value to unifying individuals into a particular type of body. Such reasoning is dangerous for those outside dominant categories, as well as those who reject arguments about choice, such as those within LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) communities arguing for uniqueness of individuals based on inherent characteristics. Second, it limits those who can, or should, act to those already seen within the positive norms of society, in terms of good bodies. Those who currently fail in their bad bodies become prohibited from advocacy. Third, this view of citizenship limits the overall conceptualization for the idea of citizenship. Focusing on the individual body draws heavily on the liberal side of citizenship and not enough on the civic/republican side. Doing so enables ignoring structural issues because awareness and individual action is prioritized. The likely fake Halloween letter exemplifies this problem. The letter stated that because it takes a village to raise a child, the village’s job is to raise parental awareness of

what a horrible job they are doing with their fat kids. The responsibility after the raised awareness becomes delegated to parents. Other responses in this specific scenario could have included community meals, a community garden, offering and taking cooking classes, participating in buy fresh, buy local campaigns, addressing factors that contribute to poverty, and so on.

Viewing bodies as the most appropriate test for citizenship or civic ideals is very limiting. Not all bodies are valued equally in U.S. society, as other social categories, including race, gender, class, ablism, all implicate the construction of what is deemed a good body. The focus on bodies as enactment of citizenship erases all the work that goes into making certain bodies more favorable than others.

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## APPENDIX

To see how many times Wann’s STANDard circulated as an original image, in April of 2013, I performed the following actions: completed Google Image and TinEye Reverse Image searches by uploading the image directly from the I Stand Tumblr; completed Google Image searches with the words “I stand marilyn wann,” “marilyn wann,” and “marilyn wann i stand” and looked at the first ten pages of results for each word grouping; searched Pinterest with the words “marilyn wann,” “I stand,” and “HAES;” and counted the likes and reblogs from two Tumblr accounts (WWMWD? and I Stand) and the numbers of likes and reshares from Marilyn Wann’s and I stand against weight bullying Facebook pages. Although Wann promoted the image through her Twitter account (@MarilynWann), she included a link to the image rather than the image itself; thus, I excluded those results. The following table includes the medium, number of original circulation(s), number of likes, number of shares, reblogs, or repins, and the full URL for each original circulation.

<b>Medium</b>	<b>Original Circulation</b>	<b># of Likes</b>	<b># of Shares, Reblogs, or Repins</b>	<b>URL(s)</b>
Tumblr: I Stand	1	2	3	<a href="http://istandagainstweightbullying.tumblr.com/post/16321487655">http://istandagainstweightbullying.tumblr.com/post/16321487655</a>
Tumblr: WWMWD ?	1	374	415	<a href="http://marilynwann.tumblr.com/post/16174699162/stand4kids-heres-my-response-to-the-fat-hating">http://marilynwann.tumblr.com/post/16174699162/stand4kids-heres-my-response-to-the-fat-hating</a>
Facebook: Marilyn Wann’s account	1	154	111	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10151183329835158&amp;set=pb.794535157.-2207520000.1366587190.&amp;type=3&amp;theater">https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10151183329835158&amp;set=pb.794535157.-2207520000.1366587190.&amp;type=3&amp;theater</a>

Medium	Original Circulation	# of Likes	# of Shares, Reblogs, or Repins	URL(s)
Facebook: I stand against weight bullying's account	1	6	1	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=264362080303709&amp;set=a.264362076970376.65847.264360320303885&amp;type=1&amp;theater">https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=264362080303709&amp;set=a.264362076970376.65847.264360320303885&amp;type=1&amp;theater</a>
Facebook: Luminous River Counseling account	1	27	0	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/luminousrivercounseling/posts/418414948182448">https://www.facebook.com/luminousrivercounseling/posts/418414948182448</a>
Pinterest: Emily Anderson account	1	1	3	<a href="http://pinterest.com/pin/206321226648660458/">http://pinterest.com/pin/206321226648660458/</a>
Pinterest: Me and only me account	1	1	1	<a href="http://pinterest.com/pin/72128031501841286/">http://pinterest.com/pin/72128031501841286/</a>
Pinterest: Rebecca Love account	1	4	6	<a href="http://pinterest.com/pin/248472104411197845/">http://pinterest.com/pin/248472104411197845/</a>
Pinterest: Kitt Lviv account	1	5	2	<a href="http://pinterest.com/pin/206602701625548663/">http://pinterest.com/pin/206602701625548663/</a>
Pinterest: Nadira Jamal account	1	0	0	<a href="http://pinterest.com/pin/283093526546862008/">http://pinterest.com/pin/283093526546862008/</a>
Pinterest: Tanya account	1	3	0	<a href="http://pinterest.com/pin/204843483020965923/">http://pinterest.com/pin/204843483020965923/</a>

Medium	Original Circulation	# of Likes	# of Shares, Reblogs, or Repins	URL(s)
Pinterest: Rachel Hart account	1	0	1	<a href="http://pinterest.com/pin/228417012320502903/">http://pinterest.com/pin/228417012320502903/</a>
Pinterest: shellie crow account	1	0	1	<a href="http://m.pinterest.com/pin/548454060840718233/">http://m.pinterest.com/pin/548454060840718233/</a>



Medium	Original Circulation	# of Likes	# of Shares, Reblogs, or Repins	URL(s)
Blogs (part 1)	10	0	0	<a href="http://www.fansshare.com/community/uploads74/9742/marilyn_wann_stand_kids/">http://www.fansshare.com/community/uploads74/9742/marilyn_wann_stand_kids/</a>  <a href="http://img27.fansshare.com/pic74/w/health-at-every-size/369/9742_marilyn_wann_stand_kids.jpg">http://img27.fansshare.com/pic74/w/health-at-every-size/369/9742_marilyn_wann_stand_kids.jpg</a>  <a href="http://www.bodylovetwellness.com/2012/01/23/is-there-hope-for-fat-kids/">http://www.bodylovetwellness.com/2012/01/23/is-there-hope-for-fat-kids/</a>  <a href="http://persephonemagazine.com/2012/01/23/is-there-hope-for-fat-kids/">http://persephonemagazine.com/2012/01/23/is-there-hope-for-fat-kids/</a>  <a href="http://www.dietsinreview.com/diet_column/02/i-stand-campaign-takes-creative-aim-at-georgias-anti-obesity-ads/">http://www.dietsinreview.com/diet_column/02/i-stand-campaign-takes-creative-aim-at-georgias-anti-obesity-ads/</a>  <a href="http://75.101.225.62/diet_column/author/margaret/">http://75.101.225.62/diet_column/author/margaret/</a>  <a href="http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/marilyn-wann/">http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/marilyn-wann/</a>  <a href="http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/ragen-chastain/">http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/ragen-chastain/</a>  <a href="http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/childrens-healthcare-of-atlanta/">http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/childrens-healthcare-of-atlanta/</a>  <a href="http://healthateverysizeblog.org/2012/02/07/the-haes-files-a-tale-of-two-billboards/">http://healthateverysizeblog.org/2012/02/07/the-haes-files-a-tale-of-two-billboards/</a>

Medium	Original Circulation	# of Likes	# of Shares, Reblogs, or Repins	URL(s)
Blogs (part 2)	13	0	0	<a href="http://healthateverysizeblog.org/2012/02/07/">http://healthateverysizeblog.org/2012/02/07/</a> <a href="http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/georgia-billboards/">http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/georgia-billboards/</a> <a href="http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/dances-with-fat/">http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/dances-with-fat/</a> <a href="http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/choa/">http://healthateverysizeblog.org/tag/choa/</a> <a href="http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/2012/01/23/i-stand/">http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/2012/01/23/i-stand/</a> <a href="http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/category/stand-4-kids/">http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/category/stand-4-kids/</a> <a href="http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/category/linda-bacon/">http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/category/linda-bacon/</a> <a href="http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/category/fat-shaming/page/2/">http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/category/fat-shaming/page/2/</a> <a href="http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/2012/01/">http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/2012/01/</a> <a href="http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/category/usa/">http://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/category/usa/</a> <a href="http://drkathleenyoung.wordpress.com/2012/02/29/love-every-body/">http://drkathleenyoung.wordpress.com/2012/02/29/love-every-body/</a> <a href="https://drkathleenyoung.wordpress.com/page/4/">https://drkathleenyoung.wordpress.com/page/4/</a> <a href="http://drkathleenyoung.wordpress.com/page/4/?iframe=true&amp;width=100%25&amp;height=100%25">http://drkathleenyoung.wordpress.com/page/4/?iframe=true&amp;width=100%25&amp;height=100%25</a>

Medium	Original Circulation	# of Likes	# of Shares, Reblogs, or Repins	URL(s)
Blogs (part 3)	15	0	0	<a href="http://danceswithfat.wordpress.com/2012/01/23/stand/">http://danceswithfat.wordpress.com/2012/01/23/stand/</a> <a href="http://danceswithfat.wordpress.com/2012/01/">http://danceswithfat.wordpress.com/2012/01/</a> <a href="http://fatbodypolitics.com/2012/01/">http://fatbodypolitics.com/2012/01/</a> <a href="http://fatbodypolitics.com/tag/activism/">http://fatbodypolitics.com/tag/activism/</a> <a href="http://fatbodypolitics.com/tag/haes/">http://fatbodypolitics.com/tag/haes/</a> <a href="http://fatbodypolitics.com/tag/marilyn-wann/">http://fatbodypolitics.com/tag/marilyn-wann/</a> <a href="http://fatbodypolitics.com/tag/body-politics/">http://fatbodypolitics.com/tag/body-politics/</a> <a href="http://fatbodypolitics.com/2012/01/22/support-stand4kids/">http://fatbodypolitics.com/2012/01/22/support-stand4kids/</a> <a href="http://fatbodypolitics.com/tag/fat-rights-2/page/2/">http://fatbodypolitics.com/tag/fat-rights-2/page/2/</a> <a href="http://fatkidsunited.wordpress.com/2012/01/23/stand4kids-tumblr/">http://fatkidsunited.wordpress.com/2012/01/23/stand4kids-tumblr/</a> <a href="http://fatkidsunited.wordpress.com/2012/01/23/is-there-hope-for-fat-kids/">http://fatkidsunited.wordpress.com/2012/01/23/is-there-hope-for-fat-kids/</a> <a href="http://www.ecologyrunner.com/2012/02/georgia-obesity-campaign-sparks-fierce.html">http://www.ecologyrunner.com/2012/02/georgia-obesity-campaign-sparks-fierce.html</a> <a href="http://dailyvenusdiva.com/2012/02/13/today-on-plus-model-radio-february-13-2012/">http://dailyvenusdiva.com/2012/02/13/today-on-plus-model-radio-february-13-2012/</a> <a href="http://ponderousboundaries.blogspot.com">http://ponderousboundaries.blogspot.com</a> <a href="http://www.theburningplatform.com/?p=31855">http://www.theburningplatform.com/?p=31855</a>

Medium	Original Circulation	# of Likes	# of Shares, Reblogs, or Repins	URL(s)
Blogs (part 4)	4	0	0	<a href="http://forum.bodybuilding.com/showthread.php?t=144357431&amp;page=3">http://forum.bodybuilding.com/showthread.php?t=144357431&amp;page=3</a> <a href="http://youretrainingforwhat.blogspot.com">http://youretrainingforwhat.blogspot.com</a> <a href="http://blog.pressan.is/likamsvirding/page/4/">http://blog.pressan.is/likamsvirding/page/4/</a> <a href="http://revolutionsresources.blogspot.com/2011/01/action-item-standards.html">http://revolutionsresources.blogspot.com/2011/01/action-item-standards.html</a>
Newspaper or newsletter ( <i>BBC News; Large and In Charge; SF Weekly; NAAFA Newsletter</i> )	4	0	0	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16939718">http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16939718</a> <a href="http://www.largeincharge.com/backissues/2012/03-2012.htm">http://www.largeincharge.com/backissues/2012/03-2012.htm</a> <a href="http://blogs.sfweekly.com/exhibitionist/2012/02/fat_activists_chew_out_atlanta.php">http://blogs.sfweekly.com/exhibitionist/2012/02/fat_activists_chew_out_atlanta.php</a> <a href="http://www.naafaonline.com/newsletterstuff/oldnewsletterstuff/February%202012%20NAAFA%20Newsletter.html">http://www.naafaonline.com/newsletterstuff/oldnewsletterstuff/February%202012%20NAAFA%20Newsletter.html</a>
<b>TOTALS</b>	59	577	544	

## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Ruth J. Beerman****I. EDUCATION**

- 2015 Ph.D. (expected) Communication; University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI  
 Concentrations: Rhetoric, Rhetorical Leadership Concentration & Women's Studies  
 Certificate  
 Key Coursework: Argumentation, Public Deliberation, Rhetorics of Constituting  
 Community and Social Controversy, Rhetorical Theory, Contemporary Rhetorical  
 Theory, Rhetoric of the Body, Rhetoric of Women's Rights in the U.S., Digital  
 Mirror  
 Dissertation: *Containing Fatness: Bodies, Motherhood, and Civic Identity in  
 Contemporary U.S. Culture*  
 Committee: Dr. Leslie J. Harris (chair), Dr. John W. Jordan, Dr. Kathryn M. Olson,  
 Dr. William M. Keith (Department of English), & Dr. Gwynne A. Kennedy  
 (Department of English and Women's Studies)
- 2009 M.A. Communication Studies; University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA  
 Concentration: General Communication  
 Thesis: *Positions of Power, Abjection and Constraint: Evaluating Discursive Attempts to  
 "Save" an Other*  
 Committee: Dr. Catherine Palczewski (chair), Dr. John Fritch, & Dr. John Burtis
- 2004 B.A., Political Science & Women and Gender Studies; Mercer University, Macon, GA  
 Summa Cum Laude, University Honors, and Political Science Departmental Honors

**II. WORK EXPERIENCE*****Teaching Experience***

- 2013-Present Instructor in Communication Studies; Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania,  
 Bloomsburg, PA.
- 2009-2013 Teaching Assistant in Communication; University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee,  
 Milwaukee, WI.
- 2004-2006 Graduate Teaching Assistant in Communication Studies; University of Northern  
 Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.

Courses taught include:

*Oral Communication*: Basic/entry level comprehensive course on public speaking, group communication, and interpersonal communication; taught at University of Northern Iowa.

*Public Speaking*: Basic/entry level class on introduction to public speaking; taught at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania & University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

*Interpersonal Communication*: Basic/entry level class on introduction to interpersonal communication; taught at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania.

*Gender and Communication*: Upper division class on how communication creates and perpetuates gendered identities and gendered interaction; taught at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania & University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

*Critical Analysis of Communication*: Upper division class on communication method of rhetorical criticism; taught at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

### ***Administrative Experience***

2011-2012     Assistant Course Director, Public Speaking; University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.

2004-2006     Assistant Debate Coach; University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.

### ***Research Experience***

2011-2012     Research assistant, Dr. William Keith, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.

Assisted developing material for a new public speaking textbook, *Public Speaking and Civic Engagement* (William Keith and Christian Lundberg). Duties included generating pedagogy, including activities, questions, and additional citations, and editing an in-press version of the textbook, ensuring consistency in the draft.

2006-2007     Research assistant, Drs. Catherine Palczewski & Victoria DeFrancisco, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.

Created material for a new gender and communication textbook, *Communicating Gender Diversity: A Critical Approach* (2007), by developing outlines, activities, discussion questions, and resources for four chapters of twelve chapters for the accompanying *Instructor's Resource CD*. Additional duties included editing the in-press bibliography, ensuring APA consistency and source accuracy.

### III. PUBLICATIONS

- Beerman, R. J. (2014). Toned arms or big butt? Michelle Obama disturbed notions of body, race, gender, and advocacy as *Let's Move!* spokesperson. In C. H. Palczewski (Ed.), *Disturbing argument: Selected works from the 18th National Communication Association/American Forensics Association Alta conference on argumentation* (pp. 81-86). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Palczewski, C. H., DeFrancisco, V. P., McGeough, D. D., & Beerman, R. (2013). Instructor's Resources for *Gender in communication: A critical introduction*. Available through SAGE Publications website.
- Rippke, P., & Beerman, R. (2013). Image comics. In R. Duncan & M. J. Smith (Eds.), *Icons of the American Comic Book: From Captain America to Wonder Woman* (Vol. 1, pp. 352-357). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO Greenwood.
- Beerman, R. J. (2012). The body unbound: *Empowered*, heroism and body image. *The Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 3(2), 201-213. Reprinted in 2014 edited collection, *Superheroes and identities*, eds. M. Gibson, D. Huxley, & J. Ormond by Routledge.
- Beerman, R. J. (2011). Too fat for Hooters? Examining the body as aesthetic evidence. In R. C. Rowland (Ed.) *Reasoned argument and social change: Selected papers from the seventeenth biennial conference on argumentation* (pp. 457-463). Washington, DC: National Communication Association.
- DeFrancisco, V. P., Palczewski, C. H., & Beerman, R. J. (2007). Instructor's Resource CD for *Communicating Gender Diversity: A Critical Approach*.
- Beerman, R. J. (2006). Agency for whom? Looking at International Women's Day 2004: A time for consternation amidst celebration. *The Iowa Journal of Communication*, 38, 163-184.

### IV. CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- Beerman, R. J. (2014, October). *What fat talk really gains and loses: How Special K's "shhhut down fat talk" campaign reinscribes fatphobic norms*. Paper presented at the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, & Gender conference, San Francisco, CA.
- Rippke, P., & Beerman, R. J. (2014, October). *Empowering alienation? Strength in solitude in Under the Skin*. Paper presented at the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, & Gender conference, San Francisco, CA.

- Beerman, R. J. (2014, April). *Moving from sexual lacunae to reclaimed sexuality: Reflections on difficult conversations regarding sexuality*. Paper performance at the Eastern Communication Association conference, Providence, RI.
- Beerman, R. J. (2013, October). *When STANDING for justice, remember the message: An Analysis of Marilyn Wann's I STAND pro-fat campaign*. Paper presented at the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, & Gender conference, Houghton, MI.
- Beerman, R. J. (2013, August). *Toned arms or big butt? Michelle Obama disturbs notions of body, race, gender, and advocacy as Let's Move! spokesperson*. Paper presented at the 2013 NCA/AFA Summer Conference on Argumentation, Alta, UT.
- Beerman, R. J. (2012, November). *Making losing weight click: Control and controlling the (dieting) subject in Weight Watchers Online*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association conference, Orlando, FL.
- Beerman, R. J. (2012, November). *"Stop sugarcoating it!": How anti-obesity rhetoric links overfeeding children to stopping the cycle of (rhetorical) violence*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association conference, Orlando, FL.
- Beerman, R. J. (2012, October). *Momentous moving: Michelle Obama as embodying the push for fitness as a public advocate in the Let's Move! campaign*. Paper presented at the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, & Gender conference, Tacoma, WA.
- Beerman, R. J. (2012, May). *Reflections*. Presentation during "Critical genealogies: Retrospection and the future of rhetorical criticism" Super Session at the Rhetoric Society of America conference, Philadelphia, PA.
- Beerman, R. J. (2012, April). *Big and beautiful? Using Drop Dead Diva to interrogate bodily intersections of gender, beauty, and fatness*. Paper presented at the Gender Matters Conference, Governors State University, University Park, IL.
- Beerman, R. J. (2011, November). *Which bodies get to play? Using community values to resolve community/individual tensions in international sport*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Conference, New Orleans, LA.
- Keith, W., Beerman, R., Cole, A., Jackl, J., Rippke, P., Schneider, S., & Yamada, K. (2011, October). *Speaking to a public: Communication and controversy*. Panel presentation at the Fifth Annual UWSP Critical Thinking Conference, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.



- Beerman, R. J. (2011, July). *Too fat for Hooters? Examining the body as aesthetic evidence*. Paper presented at the 2011 NCA/AFA Summer Conference on Argumentation, Alta, UT.
- Beerman, R. J. (2011, April). *The diasporic home: Re-evaluating meanings of home within war*. Paper presented at the Central States Communication Association Conference, Milwaukee, WI.
- Beerman, R. J. (2011, March). *The role of female superheroes: Becoming Empowered*. Paper presented at the UW-System Women's Studies and LGBTQ Conference, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.
- Beerman, R. J. (2010, April). *The discourse of saving an other: Using performance theory to unpack positions of power and constraint in President George W. Bush's Iraq war rhetoric*. Paper presented at the UW-System Women's Studies and LGBTQ Conference, University of Wisconsin, Whitewater.
- Beerman, R. (2007). *Human agency and social change: Looking at Judith Butler*. Paper presented at the First Annual College of Humanities and Fine Arts Graduate Research Symposium, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.
- Beerman, R. (2005, November). *The ends attempt to justify the means: RNC's rhetoric of Saddam Hussein's terrors*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, Boston, MA.
- Beerman, R. (2005, September). *Agency for whom? International Women's Day 2004: A time for consternation amidst celebration*. Paper presented at the Iowa Communication Association Conference, Cedar Falls, IA.

## V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 2015 Participant in Teaching Excellence Academy, Teaching and Learning Enhancement (TALE), Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. Competitively selected. This 5 day hands-on seminar focused on creating significant learning experiences through readings and discussions. Additionally, I redesigned my public speaking course to create more learning experiences and integrate new theoretical developments regarding publics and social media.
- 2014 Seminar participant in reading group on José Antonio Bowen's (2012) *Teaching naked: How moving technology out of your college classroom will improve student learning*, Teaching and Learning Enhancement (TALE), Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. This 3-hour seminar focused on the idea of a flipped classroom, where removing technology from the classroom enables a focus on in-class activities. We

discussed how to move from being a content delivery system (i.e. lecturer) to using technology as a tool to enable time for face to face classroom interactions.

- 2014 Seminar participant in reading group on Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III., & Mark A. McDaniel's (2014) *Make it stick: The science of successful learning*, Teaching and Learning Enhancement (TALE), Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. This 3-hour seminar focused on approaches to learning. By focusing on practices such as spacing, interleaving, retrieval, and common misconceptions about learning, we discussed how to better achieve learning outcomes.
- 2014 Seminar participant in session entitled "Rhetoric, Identity, Citizenship, and Civic Culture: Expanding the Modes of, and Challenging the Limits on, Public Engagement", National Communication Association's Institute for Faculty Development, Hope College, Holland, MI. Lead by Catherine Palczewski, our discussions focused on individual, institutional, and bodily enactments and definitions of citizenship. Key takeaways from the week long session included both scholarly and pedagogical approaches to citizenship.
- 2014 Seminar participant in reading group on Stephen D. Brookfield's (2013) *Powerful Techniques for Teaching Adults*, Teaching and Learning Enhancement (TALE), Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. This 3-hour seminar focused on adults as learners, with a particular attention to how power operates in the classroom, as instructors, as students, and with particular topics. We also discussed various teaching techniques and their effectiveness related to using power productively, including discussions, chalk-talk, having students write down quotation from article they disagreed with to spark debate, and many more.
- 2014 Seminar participant in reading group on Helen Fox's (2009) *When Race Breaks Out: Conversations about Race and Racism in College Classrooms*, Teaching and Learning Enhancement (TALE), Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. This 3-hour seminar focused on race and ethnicity, both conceptually and as relevant to the college classroom. More specifically, we discussed how to best integrate such issues into the classroom as well as how to handle when race may "break out" and require facilitation to engage in productive discussions.
- 2013 Seminar participant in discussion of "White Privilege: Racism, White Denial, and the Costs of Inequality," Teaching and Learning Enhancement (TALE), Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. This 1-hour seminar focused on understandings of white privilege, by using the film *White Like Me* by Tim Wise to orient discussions. After watching the film, we discussed ways to integrate discussions of racial privilege into the classroom, in terms of activities, readings, and topics.

- 2013 Seminar participant in workshop entitled, “Why do student development and course climate matter for students?”, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. As instructors, we have significant control over the climate we shape. This workshop used Chapter 6 of Susan A. Ambrose and Michael W. Bridges’ (2010) *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* to examine the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical aspect of the classroom climate. By focusing on student learning, student development, and course design, I developed a more rounded sense of course climate and how to better address students’ needs.
- 2013 Seminar participant in session entitled, “Building a Career in Rhetorical Studies,” Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute, Lawrence, KS. This workshop focused on implicit and explicit ways various choices factor into building a career in the academy, including balancing teaching, research, and service. Related to teaching specifically, we used Ken Bain’s (2004) *What the Best College Teachers Do* as a framework to discuss best teaching practices and ways to make classroom best environment for both educators and students.
- 2012 Space Space Training: Ally Development, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. This professional development enables campus community members to organize their offices such that the diversity of all others is respected by developing knowledge and skills of how to address campus climate for members of LGBT communities.
- 2011 Using D2L (Desire2Learn) Discussion Forums for Effective Teaching and Learning, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. This 2-hour workshop addressed the pedagogy of online discussions: creating good forum assignments, managing forum discussions, and grading forum postings quickly and effectively. I also produced a discussion assignment for a course, which I used in subsequent sections of public speaking.

## **VI. HONORS AND AWARDS**

- 2015 Teaching Excellence Academy award, \$400; Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, Bloomsburg, PA.
- 2011-2013 Melvin H. Miller Service Award, Department of Communication; University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI (awarded three consecutive years).
- 2013 Graduate Student Travel Support Award, \$400; University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.
- 2012 Graduate Student Travel Support Award, \$450; University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.

- 2012 Graduate Student Travel Support Award, \$400; University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.
- 2009-2010 Chancellor's Award; University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.
- 2007 Second place paper, First Annual College of Humanities and Fine Arts Graduate Research Symposium; University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA. Also awarded \$500.
- 2005 Outstanding graduate paper award, Iowa Communication Association.
- 2005 Graduate Student Opportunity Fund, Travel Support, \$250; University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.

## **VII. SERVICE**

### ***Departmental Service***

- 2014-2015 Chair, Ad-hoc Academic Integrity Committee, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania.
- 2011-2013 Graduate mentor to new master's students, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- 2011-2013 Course mentor to new public speaking teaching assistants, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- 2012-2013 Volunteer judge at Public Speaking Showcase, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- 2012 Vice-President of student chapter of Rhetoric Society of America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- 2010-2011 Developed, organized, and ran departmental Public Speaking Showcase, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, with Lindsey Harness.
- 2010-2011 Mentor to undergraduate students in preparation for conference presentations at Central States Communication Association Conference
- 2010 Graduate Representative, Undergraduate Committee, Communication Department, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Fall only).

***University Service***

- 2014-2015 Co-coach for the Frederick Douglass Institute's Debate Society, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania.
- 2014 Chaired panel for Bloomsburg University's Frederick Douglass Institute for Academic Excellence's 14th Annual Undergraduate Interdisciplinary Conference.
- 2014 Co-lead workshop entitled, "Public Speaking, Engaging Others, Non-Verbal Communication," as part of Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania's Center for Leadership and Engagement certificate program, with Phil Rippke.
- 2014 Co-lead workshop entitled, "Digital Citizenship & Ethics", part of Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania's Center for Leadership and Engagement certificate program, with Phil Rippke.
- 2012-2013 Graduate Representative, Graduate School Advisory Council University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- 2011-2012 Graduate Representative, Admission Records Policy Committee, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- 2011 Co-lead communication workshop at residence assistant orientation entitled "Resident Assistant Training: Starting the conversation," University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, with William Keith and Lindsey Harness.

***Professional Service***

- 2011-2014 Volunteer Reviewer for Public Address Division of National Communication Association (NCA).
- 2012, 2014 Volunteer Reviewer for Rhetorical and Communication Theory Division of National Communication Association (NCA).
- 2013 Volunteer Reviewer for Feminist and Women's Studies Division of National Communication Association (NCA).
- 2011-2014 Volunteer Reviewer for Rhetorical Theory and Criticism of Central States Communication Association (CSCA).
- 2011 Volunteer Reviewer for Women's Caucus Divisions of Central States Communication Association (CSCA).

### ***Community Service***

- 2010-2012 Volunteer speech judge for National Christian Forensics & Communications Association Qualifier tournament, Milwaukee, WI.
- 2009-2010 Volunteer debate judge for Milwaukee Urban Debate League, Milwaukee, WI.
- 2007-2009 Paid speech judge for Henderson Invitational Individual Events Tournament, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.
- 2006-2008 Paid debate judge for Ulrich Debate Tournament, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.

### **VIII. PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

- National Communication Association (NCA), 2009-present.
- Rhetoric Society of America (RSA), 2010-present.
- Organization for Research on Women and Communication (ORWAC), 2010-present.
- Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, & Gender (OSCLG), 2012-present.

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